DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 288 833 SP 029 574

AUTHOR Nias, Jennifer
TITLE Seeing Anew: Teachers' Theories of Action.
INSTITUTION Deakin Univ., Victoria, (Australia). School of Education.
REPORT NO ISBN-0-7300-0448-1
PUB DATE 87
NOTE 64p.
AVAILABLE FROM Deakin University Press, Deakin University, Victoria 3217, Australia. ($11.00).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120) -- Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142) -- Books (010)

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS *Change Strategies; *Educational Change; Group Discussion; *Group Dynamics; *Individual Development; Interpersonal Communication; *Social Psychology; Teacher Attitudes; Teacher Behavior

ABSTRACT

In the first section of this monograph, the reasons why the personal nature of teaching makes it relatively impervious to outside influences are explored. It is suggested that change in education occurs only when the individual teacher changes. Educational innovation is viewed as a matter of facilitating and sustaining modification in the individual teacher's perspectives and sense of identity. The second section discusses the theories of S. H. Foulkes, who stressed the social nature of people and placed the responsibility for personal change in the hands of individuals, while accepting that to achieve this they need the challenge and support of others. Foulkes saw the individual and the group as inseparably linked. He asserted that change can be achieved through open discussion in which the agenda is set by group members. The third section of the monograph discusses education and suggests, with examples, ways that Foulkes's ideas might contribute to both teacher education and school development. The final section explores the potential for change offered by Foulkes's theories, and those of other social scientists who see social changes as linked, through communication, to the development of individual consciousness. (JD)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED288833

Seeing anew: teachers' theories of action

Jennifer Nias

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

F. Warby

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

SP029574

Seeing anew: teachers' theories of action

Jennifer Nias
Cambridge Institute of Education

Deakin University

This book forms part of the ETL825 *Teachers' Theories of Action* course offered by the School of Education in Deakin University's Open Campus Program. It has been prepared by Jennifer Nias for the ETL825 *Teachers' Theories of Action* course team, whose members are:

Course team
Judy Mousley
W. John Smyth (chairperson)
Rob Walker
Judy Wells (course developer)

Consultant
David H. Tripp

The course includes:
Jennifer Nias, *Seeing Anew: Teacher's Theories of Action**
David H. Tripp, *Theorising Practice: The Teacher's Professional Journal*
W. John Smyth, *A Rationale for Teachers' Critical Pedagogy: A Handbook**
Mary Louise Holly, *Keeping a Personal-Professional Journal* (ESA843)*

* These books are available from Deakin University Press, Victoria 3217

Students enrolled in the course are also supplied with a guide to the course.

Published by Deakin University, Victoria 3217
Distributed by Deakin University Press
First published 1987

© Deakin University 1987

Edited, designed and typeset by Deakin University Production Unit
Printed by Deakin University Printery

ISBN 0 7300 0448 1

National Library of Australia
Cataloguing-in-publication data

Nias, Jennifer.
Seeing anew.

ISBN 0 7300 0448 1.

1. Teaching. 2. Teachers–Psychology. I. Deakin University. School of Education. Open Campus Program. II. Title. III. Title: Teachers' theories of action.

371.1

Contents

Introduction	1
The perceptual basis of teaching	3
The individual in the group: the work of S.H. Foulkes	15
'Free' discussion groups in schools	28
Group-analytic psychotherapy and critical theory	40
Conclusion	50
References	54
Acknowledgments	58

Introduction

That change in education occurs with glacial slowness has now become an orthodoxy. Two decades ago, the educational press, school staffrooms, government departments, institutions of higher education were buzzing with recommendations, strategies and recipes for pedagogical and curriculum change. Now the popular cry is for stability, if not retrenchment, and academics concern themselves with explaining why theories of change and innovation have not succeeded in changing schools.

In the search for reasons, very little attention has been paid to the nature of teaching itself. Fullan (1982) comes nearest to this in his analysis of *The Meaning of Change*. He argues in this book that the acceptability of new curricula to teachers can be understood only by examining the effect these are likely to have upon classroom processes and teachers' lives, and that change in the way teachers behave in the classroom and staffroom occurs only when they have had the opportunity to examine, try out, modify, selectively reject and absorb proposed innovations—that is, when they feel that they 'own' them. Yet even Fullan's insightful commentary overlooks certain aspects of teaching as an occupation and of the characteristics which it encourages in those who pursue it. In particular, teachers' apparent reluctance to alter what they do in classrooms can be understood only if we accept that teaching is a personal activity, shaped by individual perceptions, perspectives and judgments and that teachers, like other adults, bring to their work a sense of self, the preservation of which is of prime importance to them.

In this monograph, I explore in the first section the reasons why the personal nature of teaching makes it relatively impervious to outside influences and suggest that change in education occurs only when the individual who is the teacher changes. Viewed in this light, educational innovation is a matter of facilitating and sustaining modifications in the individual teacher's perspectives and sense of identity. This way of approaching change leads into social psychology and psychotherapy rather than into organisational theory or the example offered by successfully adaptive businesses (models which have proved attractive in the past to some educationalists). Within these fields, I have rejected those theories (such as behaviour modification) which tend to treat the individual as object rather than subject; I have assumed that teachers, as people, have an ethical right to determine the extent and nature of the personal changes which they adopt. One model in particular seems appropriate to teaching, that of a relatively unknown scientist, S. H. Foulkes, who worked with

Habermas and others in the Institute of Social Research in Frankfurt in the 1930s and subsequently as a psychotherapist in England until his death in 1976.

Foulkes's ideas, presented in the second section, offer teachers a powerful tool because they place the responsibility for personal change in the hands of individuals while accepting that to achieve this they need the challenge and support of others. Roped together by a common commitment to the exploration and understanding of their own experience, members of a group can support one another across the chasm of personal redefinition and modification. According to Foulkes, such changes are achieved through open discussion in which the agenda is set by group members. He used 'discussion', however, in a sense which bound its participants to a shared struggle to create, through talking, common meanings which would enable each of the group members to understand and be understood by all the others, and, in the process to modify his or her perceptions and behaviour. He saw the individual and the group as inseparable, both because people are social beings who bring all their life experience into a group with them and attempt to impose upon others the realities which they have constructed from it, and because changes in their beliefs, values, attitudes, views and actions can occur only through encountering those of others. Sharing, communication and growth are inextricably linked. The group enhances the potential and stimulates the development of individuals to the extent that the latter participate actively in the discussion of their own experience and accept responsibility, with the support of others, for understanding and redefining the social contexts which shape and constrain them.

The third section returns to education and, accepting the difficulty of making formal use of such discussion groups in the present state of teacher opinion and school organisation, it suggests, with examples, ways in which Foulkes's ideas might contribute to both teacher education and school development.

In the final section I further explore the potential for change offered by Foulkes's theories, linking them with the work of the 'critical' social scientists, especially Habermas, who, like Foulkes, see social change as inextricably connected, through communication, to the development of individual consciousness.

The perceptual basis of teaching

The daily world of the teacher is a capricious one. Classrooms are multi-dimensional, crowded places in which the teacher has several roles, the obligation to fulfil a variety of functions and the need to carry out a multitude of activities simultaneously or in very rapid sequence. Further, classrooms are unpredictable: methods which helped one pupil learn may prove ineffective with another or with the same pupil on a different day, moods and reactions may be affected by circumstances outside the classroom which are unknown to the teacher, arbitrary events may curtail the availability or usefulness of resources. Teachers are subjected to a constant barrage of information, on all sensory channels, to which they must respond sensitively (since a mis-timed or inappropriate response will often provoke a downward spiral of inattention, misunderstanding or conflict) and swiftly, with little time for sustained rational thought. Indeed, observational studies (e.g. Kounin 1970; Doyle 1977) have suggested that effective classroom managers are, among other things, good information processors (e.g. they are capable of 'chunking' incoming information to reduce its complexity).

Processing information is, however, only a first step. Teaching depends on the ability to make sense of incoming information, to synthesise it rapidly with past experience and then to make judgments. Much teaching consists of ignoring some of the messages available in the classroom (e.g. the noise outside, the conduct of particular children, the colour and condition of the walls), of seizing upon others (such as the non-verbal behaviour of specific individuals, the state of the weather, the arrival of a new pupil) and of interpreting them so as to make informed guesses about the response most likely to result eventually in pupils' learning.

Each of these steps—receiving information, processing and interpreting it—is based ultimately upon perception. We receive information through our sense organs and store it in our central nervous system in ways which make it possible for us to use it, often many years later, to interpret, extrapolate, generalise and predict. This is not to suggest that perception is a passive process. Just as individuals can see or hear different things, depending on the condition of their eyes and ears and the circumstances under which sight or hearing is required, so they interpret the information they receive in varied ways. As Abercrombie (1969, p. 63) demonstrates in her masterly book on the psychology of perception: 'We never come to an act of perception with an entirely blank mind, but are always in a state of preparedness or expectancy, because of our past

experience.'

Psychologists and physiologists have expressed this fact in different ways. The term used by Piaget and by Abercrombie is 'schemata'. According to Vernon (1955, p. 181), these are 'persistent, deep-rooted, and well-organized classifications of ways of perceiving, thinking and behaving' which are also 'living and flexible'. Once formed, they are tools which help us to see, or not to see, to decode, translate, interpret, evaluate and respond. They are slowly built up as, from birth, we develop and exercise the skill of seeing (or hearing, smelling, tasting, touching), and they are modified by further experience and activity. By acting upon and in response to what we see, we check and change our existing schemata and create new ones. Perception is an active and responsive process which helps us not to mirror the world around us, but to order and make sense of it.

Indeed, the schemata we employ may ensure that we see what we expect to see and often, therefore, distort the information we receive. Such distortion is particularly likely because schemata become linked and integrated into consistent wholes so that we respond as much to patterns, or to the verbal cues which suggest them, as we do to specific stimuli. Context, purpose and imagination will also influence whether we attend to part or the whole of something and how we interpret what we perceive. However much we may wish to use our sense organs simply to 'receive' the external world, our nervous system sieves, classifies, organises and changes the impulses carried by the nerve fibres from the receptors to the brain.

A single schema generally has a fairly specific referent. For example, many people have a schema built through experience which leads them to expect that they can open a door by moving it, often in a limited arc, round a vertical axis. This schema is modified when they encounter sliding doors but it still enables them to predict the ways in which doors in general open and shut. Not all schemata have such precise referents, however. Abercrombie (1969, p. 40) argues that 'many of the schemata that affect our behaviour are of a much more generalized and diffuse kind . . . [they are loosely] organized in more generalized, vague or ill-defined patterns . . . [for which] the term "assumption" seems more appropriate' (pp. 63–4). These 'basic assumptions' influence what we perceive in any situation and, therefore, the judgments that we make. According to Abercrombie the process of building schemata and assumptions begins at birth and is, therefore, deeply affected by the behaviour of those who come into close physical contact with the infant and growing child. Later, many of the ways in which individuals 'know' and 'see' the world are formed by non-verbal contact with members of a wider social group who share similar attitudes or behaviour patterns to the child's family and/or school. Though many schemata can be checked or modified by action or physical manipulation, others, and especially those which relate to abstract or far-distant phenomena, can be tested only through listening to people who hold different views and by laying our own perceptions out for challenge by them. Since 'many of the most potent schemata or assumptions were established before the child could talk, and having been made non-verbally, are very difficult to talk about' (Abercrombie 1969, p. 73), it may be difficult for individuals to discover what their own basic assumptions are

or to articulate them to others.

Indeed, throughout the complex process of making a judgment (given that this may involve not only perceiving, but also describing, naming, classifying, evaluating evidence, extrapolating, predicting, generalising (Abercrombie 1969), we draw as much upon information derived from distantly related and unconscious schemata as we do upon the 'facts' before us. Moreover, the latter can be checked—we can look again, test our perceptions through action, repeat the experiment—but the former cannot because we contribute to it ourselves from our past experience of similar things or situations. Until distant schemata can be questioned and made susceptible to testing in the same way as the stimuli immediately presented to our sense organs, the information that they yield will be of dubious validity. Yet we normally accept what we perceive as 'true' and, left to ourselves, might never call it in question. Furthermore, schemata are usually modified by the presentation of material which is compatible with, though slightly different from, that which exists. Information presented to learners will not lead, in Piagetian terms, either to assimilation or to accommodation, if it is too far removed from that which they already have. Unless new schemata can be brought into suitable relationships with old ones, the latter will not change. As Marris (1974) suggests, no innovation can be assimilated unless its meaning is shared. Substantial modifications to our schemata or basic assumptions may, therefore, need to take place incrementally and over long periods of time.

In addition, many of our schemata and assumptions are formed, especially at home and at school, in situations where we are physically, emotionally or intellectually dependent upon those who are helping us to acquire them. As children, we seldom challenge the authority of those who teach us to 'see' and even less often are we encouraged to do so. There is, therefore, a strong tendency for adults to be authority-dependent in circumstances which require the formation of new schemata or the modification of old ones. Change which consists of altering basic assumptions to please a new teacher, parent-substitute or employer merely reinforces this pattern. Thus the traditional teacher–pupil or employer–employee relationship—presenting, as it often does, a very limited range of alternative attitudes and interpretations—is unlikely to result in the acceptance of uncertainty or open choice as necessary conditions for continuing personal growth. People need their peers, not their superiors, as change agents, if they are to engage in the kind of activity which will help them continually to perceive the world in new ways.

When we apply Abercrombie's lucid and convincing account of 'the anatomy of judgment' to teaching, several things become clear. The judgments teachers make outside the shifting, capricious world of the classroom and their moment-to-moment reactions within it, depend upon how they perceive particular events, behaviours, materials, persons. In turn, these perceptions will be shaped by the schemata or basic assumptions from which they derive. The earlier schemata or assumptions have been formed, the less they have been subject to discovery and discussion and the more integrated they are into a coherent whole. The greater their association with feelings of dependency, the more difficult it will be for an individual to raise them to a consciousness level, to own or to change them. Without this kind of 'conscious raising' and in the absence of alter-

native schemata, teachers will continue to make the same judgments. Whatever else may alter in their school situations, their teaching—dependent as it is upon stable patterns of perception—is likely to continue unchanged.

There are other ways of stating the notion that individual teachers, as people, approach their jobs with different basic assumptions about, for example, the relative status of school-knowledge and pupil-knowledge, pupils' motives for learning, the nature and value of school hierarchies, the nature of authority, or the importance in the curriculum of music, science or numeracy. Kelly (1955) argued that we all view the world by means of a number of personally constructed bi-polar opposites, and several authors (e.g. Nash 1973; Taylor 1976; Ingvarson & Greenway 1984) have used his method to elicit teachers' 'personal constructs'. Hammersley (1977) and Delamont (1976) speak of teachers' 'perspectives' as an ordered set of beliefs and orientations within which, or by reference to which, situations are defined or construed by teachers (and pupils). Sharp and Green (1975) have attempted to identify the perspectives and 'images' (Elbaz 1983) of particular primary school teachers. These authors have all argued that individual teachers' views of specific pupils and many of their actions within and outside the classroom are determined by the constructs and/or perspectives which they have acquired over the years.

Elliott (1977) and Carr and Kemmis (1983) talk of teachers' 'practical constructs', 'practical theories' or 'theories-in-action' and Schön (1983) looks more generally at the theories professionals generate from their practice. Elliott's terms refer to the hypotheses which teachers use when they discuss, plan, carry out or evaluate their work. One teacher may think, for example, 'If I encourage the pupils to compete for stars, this will make all of them concentrate more', while another may argue, 'If I praise something about each child's work, everyone's self-esteem will increase and they will all work harder'. Each hypothesis is then tested in action; the results, themselves influenced by what each teacher expects to happen, are likely to 'prove' it to be true and so reinforce the individual teacher's belief in the soundness of his or her 'practical theory'. The idea that the classroom is a laboratory in which the teacher is constantly setting and testing hypotheses lay behind Stenhouse's (1975) belief in teachers' capacity to be researchers. Of Stenhouse's pioneer work in the Humanities Curriculum Project, Abercrombie (1969, p. 96) said, 'The project thus involved a cyclical process in which it is hardly useful to consider research and teaching as distinct activities'. Since that date, many teachers in countries across the world have become engaged in subjecting their theories-in-action to 'systematic enquiry made public', as Stenhouse (Rudduck & Hopkins 1985) called research. In this respect, Abercrombie's pioneer work (1969, 1974) with medical and architectural students presented educationalists with the same message as Stenhouse: that they could derive valid and valuable information from their practical experience provided that they tested it, acted upon it and considered alternative ways of perceiving, interpreting and generalising from it.

The idea, however expressed, that we all have deeply-rooted, well-organised, stable ways of perceiving, thinking and behaving also underlies another group of research studies. There is growing evidence (Woods 1981; Nias 1984a, 1985a; Pollard 1985) that teachers have a sense of

personal identity which precedes and transcends their assumption of an occupational identity, and that the preservation of this sense of self is, for many of them, an overwhelming priority in their choice of career and conduct at work. In defence of their self-image, they not only negotiate relationships with their classes and their colleagues which enable them to 'be themselves' within the classroom, but they also order their careers (including leaving the profession) so as to maintain a sense of personal fulfilment or growth. Detailed arguments to support these claims are presented in the publications cited above, and in particular in Nias (1984a, 1985b).

Little is known, however, about how or when the 'self' is formed, though differing hypotheses have been advanced by psychologists such as Freud, Klein and Winnicott, and sociologists such as Cooley, Thomas and Mead. In the tradition of symbolic interactionism (see, e.g. Mead 1934), the self is a social product shaped by the response of others, yet capable of innovating, of initiating actions and reflecting upon them. We all have the capacity to reflect not only upon the actions of others but also upon our own behaviour and the response it invokes from them. Mature actors are self-conscious, even though they can know themselves only through their social identities.

The contexts which determine these social identities change with time, place and role. Symbolic interactionists have, therefore, evolved the notion of 'multiple selves' which reflect individuals' perceptions of themselves in relation to the different groups in which they participate. These 'multiple selves' encompass individuals' 'ideal' and 'real' selves as well as taking account of the way they seem to themselves ('self-as-ego') and how they think others see them ('self-as-alter').

Yet few social psychologists would wish to defend a totally situational view of the self. Katz (1960), for example, suggests that each individual develops, through contact with significant others, an inner self or core. Ball (1972) developed this notion, distinguishing a person's 'situational selves' from his or her 'substantial self'. The latter comprises a person's most salient and most valued views of, and attitudes to, self, and is persistently defended and highly resistant to change.

It is easy to see the overlap between this view of the self and Abercrombie's work on the 'anatomy of judgment'. 'In learning to see [ourselves], we build up schemata or assumptions [through interaction with significant others] by means of which incoming information [about ourselves] is organised, and by acting on what we perceive these schemata [about ourselves and others in relation to us] are continually checked and modified' (Abercrombie 1969, p. 71). My addition of the words in brackets makes clear the compatability of the two approaches, though one is drawn from theoretical studies in sociology, the other from empirical studies of visual perception. Moreover, Abercrombie's suggestion that some of our most potent basic assumptions are formed by close physical contact with significant others before we can talk, may help us to understand the tenacity of the individual self-image. Combining the two approaches, we may view the substantial self as self-referential schemata and assumptions which were built up through interaction with significant others in infancy and childhood. In addition, we hold attitudes to others and views on their perceptions of us which have become part of the substantial self

because they have been continually confirmed over many years by significant others. In these respects the 'ego' and the 'alter' are static and mutually reinforcing rather than flexible and mutually modifying. Together they add up to a set of relatively impermeable assumptions that we hold about ourselves.

Further evidence and explanation for the importance to the individual of maintaining a stable self-image may be found in the notion of cognitive dissonance. Festinger (1957) argued that it is psychologically uncomfortable for us to hold views which are mutually incompatible or to act in ways which are inconsistent with one or more of them. This discomfort he described as 'cognitive dissonance'. He suggested that we resolve such dissonance by modifying our views so as to bring them into line with one another. Katz (1960), building on Festinger's work, argued that the function of attitudes is to allow us to express our values in a consistent fashion. Rokeach (1973) extended this idea with the claim that the dissonances most likely to cause individuals to change their views, arise at the level of beliefs and values and, by implication, that it is against dissonance in values or between values and actions that we most strongly protect ourselves. It follows that we are likely most strongly to defend from possible inconsistencies those attitudes which are expressive of values.

We do not simply defend any values however, but rather, those which form part of the self-image. Katz argues that attitudes which defend the ego are the least subject to dissonance and the most resistant to change. Rokeach makes a similar suggestion, that dissonance is experienced only when inconsistent attitudes (or actions and attitudes) relate to the self. Now values appear to play an important part in the aims of many teachers (Ashton 1975; King 1978; Scheinfeld & Messerschmidt 1979; Nias 1981; Woods 1981; Yonemura 1982). Indeed, I have argued elsewhere (Nias 1984a) that many primary teachers choose teaching because they see it as a means of propagating their values or, more often, of living consistently with them. They frequently leave their jobs or even the profession when they find the latter is no longer possible, that is, when there is prolonged and continued dissonance between the values which form a central part of their self-conception and the occupational lives they lead. In addition, some teachers make an early decision to teach so that 'teacher' becomes an integral part of their self-image (Lortie 1975; Nias 1981, 1984a). Thus, the more deeply committed to teaching individuals are, either because teaching enables them to translate values into actions or because they have a long-standing and powerful picture of themselves as 'teacher', the more likely they are to try to avoid holding views or taking actions which are dissonant with their idea of themselves as a teacher.

As the individual child moves beyond his or her immediate circle of significant others, these are supplemented by the 'generalised other', a term which Mead coined to describe an individual's understanding of the organised roles of participants within any defined situation. It does not refer to an actual group of people but to the supposed attitudes and opinions of others which are then invoked by the self for the regulation of behaviour. These views are often mediated through the beliefs and behaviours of 'reference groups', that is, groups which individuals use for self-evaluation and as a source of personal goals and values. Significant

others are distinguished from generalised others and from reference groups by their crucial role in early socialisation and by the fact that normally they are, or have been, in direct contact with the person to whom they are 'significant'. By contrast, reference groups need not be friendship or membership groups and may indeed exist only in the individual's imagination. Their importance lies not in their physical but in their symbolic presence and their influence is transmitted by communication rather than by face-to-face contact. Membership of such a group is thus a question of identification, not of affiliation or allegiance. Indeed, it is possible for an individual's actions, taken in response to the norms of his or her reference group, to run counter to the interests of his or her membership group. Moreover, as we form and negotiate our multiple, situational selves, our reference groups change over time and with alterations in circumstances. They may even conflict, inducing the need for the resolution within the individual of dissonance between the warring 'selves'. In addition, the substantial self is supported and defended by reference groups, since identification with such groups is of crucial importance to the process of 'ego-anchoring' (Sherif & Wilson 1953).

The concept of the reference group, however, has come to be used by sociologists in an all-embracing fashion whose very scope reduces its analytic value. Three main meanings have been given to the term since its first appearance in 1942, in the work of the American social psychologist, Hyman. The first is comparative, to indicate a group serving as a standard for comparison in the self-appraisal of, for example, status or material rewards. The second is normative: within a decade it was also established, notably by the work of Merton and Kitt (1957) and of Newcomb (1950), as a phrase describing any group by whom people wish to be accepted and treated as members and thus by whose norms and values they evaluate themselves. Used in this sense, it was quickly accepted by some sociologists as a very potent force.

The third meaning relates to the influence of reference groups on perception. In particular, Sherif and Wilson (1953) speak of reference groups as groups whose norms are used as anchoring points in structuring the perceptual field, and claims that they are used as organising devices with which to order experiences, perceptions and ideas of self. Shibutani (1972) takes this argument further, claiming that one's 'perspective' (in Abercrombie's terms 'schemata' or 'assumptions') is an outline scheme which, running ahead of experience, defines and guides it. Thus once the particular outlook of a reference group has been internalised, it becomes a 'frame of reference' which is brought to bear on new situations. Most powerfully, it determines what is accepted as information about reality. Since we all participate simultaneously in a variety of social worlds, however, we are all likely to be confronted from time to time with the need to choose between two or more conflicting frames of reference. It is in such situations, where alternative definitions of reality are possible, that problems of loyalty arise. According to Shibutani (1972), the concept of the reference group is, therefore, an indispensable tool for understanding the behaviour of people in large, pluralistic and technologically sophisticated societies, for it enables us to see:

> how a person defines the situation, which perspective he uses in arriving at such a definition, and who constitutes the audience whose responses

> provide the necessary confirmation and support for his position . . . [The use of this concept allows us to focus] attention upon the expectations the actor imputes to others, the communication channels in which he participates, and his relations with those with whom he identifies himself (p. 171).

My own study of primary school teachers (Nias 1985b) confirmed the importance to them of the in-school and extra-school reference groups by which they sustained their sense of personal identity. For each individual, discussion with members of these groups served the interrelated functions of defending the substantial self and defining the reality to which that self had to react. As a result, teachers who failed to find referential support within their schools—that is, who had no-one to whom they felt they could talk—came progressively to deny the social reality of adult life within school and in many cases left the profession. Those who found confirming responses from even one other person felt confident in behaving consistently with their self-image, even when their actions were disruptive or divisive for the school as a whole. A few were able to take the whole staff as a reference group, a development which increased their job-satisfaction and strengthened their commitment to teaching as an occupation. For all except this minority, extra-school groups were of critical importance in defining and sustaining the individual's sense of not only personal but also professional identity. Although primary schools are relatively simple in organisational terms, their members evidently experience the conflict between frames of reference which, for Shibutani, characterises complex societies. That they do, is a reflection both of teachers' social isolation within school and of their access to others outside school who are closer to them in values and beliefs than are their colleagues.

Interviews, ten years later, with forty-five of the same teachers (Nias 1986a, 1986b) emphasised the value which they attached to these reference groups. Job-satisfaction was highly related to the presence of a reference group within a school, particularly when its members were friends (or lovers) as well as colleagues. When teachers share basic assumptions and values with those with whom they work, they speak enthusiastically about their working lives. When common perceptions are strengthened by affection, the situation takes on an added dimension and becomes one of 'absolute commitment' or 'total fulfilment'—'the best period of my life' (Nias 1986a). To believe and work and love together appears to be, for those teachers fortunate enough to find it, a potent and heady mix, rendering its members almost impervious to pressures from superiors or peers.

It follows that a reference group within a school can be, depending on circumstances, a powerful obstacle to change or a strong innovative force. In either case, it reinforces its members in the views they already hold, rather than encouraging them to seek new ones. In Abercrombie's terms, though each member of the group lives in his or her own perceptual world, understanding and interpreting it through personal schemata, the generalised and diffuse assumptions which they share enable them to hold the same attitudes towards the matters which encouraged the reference group to form. By definition, there is seldom dissent or creative tension within a reference group. Its members preserve an individual and common sense of identity by telling each other they are right and reminding one another that other people are mistaken or misled. Though someone who adopts

the perspective of a fresh reference group is engaging in personal change, this is no guarantee that further self-modification will follow; converts are notoriously dogmatic in defence of their new faith. Acceptance of multiple realities and continuing innovation involves a willingness to 'find a new kind of stability based on the recognition and acceptance of ambiguity, uncertainty and open choice' (Abercrombie 1969, p. 171). It depends, in short, upon the existence of a reference group which will not confirm its member's existing views, but instead will help them to perceive self-examination and openness to change as natural and desirable states.

By definition, an individual cannot be his or her own reference group. Moreover, since schemata are altered only by checking them against the external world (through action or physical manipulation) or against its symbolic representation (particularly speech), individuals often need opportunities to act differently and talk freely before they can become aware of their basic assumptions and how these differ from other people's. For teachers in particular, a necessary condition for professional change is likely to be the creation of an atmosphere in which they feel free to try out new ways of behaving and to discuss with their peers what they think and do. Further, given the unconscious nature of many basic assumptions and the fact that teachers may, therefore, be unaware of the schemata they are using, such discussion must allow for, even encourage, the statement of alternative viewpoints and the expression of potentially controversial attitudes. It is only through seeing different reactions to the same situation and listening to a variety of alternative explanations that individuals are enabled to compare and contrast their own world view with that of other people, and, as they become aware of differences, to alter their own beliefs and attitudes, if they so desire.

Moreover, as Marris (1974) has so vividly shown, changes in personal identity involve feelings of loss, anxiety and struggle. During any redefinition of self (for example, during bereavement or divorce) people encounter doubt, pain and a sense of losing control. When teachers begin to compare their views and actions with others, and through these activities become aware of a felt-need for a shift in their frames of reference, they are likely to be fearful, defensive and in need of reassurance and support. In Schön's, words, no one can experience personal change without 'passing through zones of uncertainty' (1971, p. 12).

The situation is further complicated for those teachers who experience difficulty in separating their personal and occupational identities. As Elliott (1977) found, in the Ford Teaching Project, the people most resistant to examining or changing their own teaching were those who identified most fully with their work; lacking alternative 'selves' they did not dare to scrutinise the only one they had. Yet even for the others, there is something threatening about an assault upon 'the self at work'. Marris (1974) describes this process in his book *Loss and Change*, noting that occupational identity represents the accumulated wisdom of how to handle the job, derived from the workers' own experience and the experience of all who have had the job before or share it with them. Change threatens to invalidate this experience, robbing them of the skills they have learnt and confusing their purposes, upsetting the subtle rationalisations and compensations by which they reconcile the different aspects of their situation.

Teachers are particularly vulnerable to any hint that they may be losing control over themselves or their circumstances. Lortie (1975), Woods (1979), King (1978), Connell (1985) are among those who have drawn attention to the importance attached by teaching as an occupational sub-culture to 'being in control'. The fact that teachers are *in loco parentis* as regards their pupils' physical safety makes the exercise of discipline a necessity, but the stress teachers lay upon control goes beyond this. In Nias (1986b) I explored what it meant to individuals to 'feel like a teacher'. Their answers were almost unanimous: feeling in control, feeling responsible and never feeling off the job. Riseborough (1985) makes a similar point in his description of the impact which one uncontrollable pupil had upon the self-image and mental health of an experienced teacher. Nash (1973) points out that pupils reinforce teachers' assumptions that they should be able to control what is going on in the classroom, and parents share this view (Elliott et al 1981). In other words, in our culture, it is generally accepted that those responsible for young people's learning will also regulate their behaviour. So, teachers who experience a sense of loss of control are threatened at a professional as well as a personal level. The sense of uncertainty which accompanies any redefinition of self is, therefore, compounded for teachers by a fear that their ability as practitioners is being called in question.

To sum up, teaching consists of making frequent personal judgments which are themselves dependent upon the receipt and interpretation of information. Change in individual teachers must, therefore, involve them in altering long-engrained perceptual habits. Efforts to help teachers alter the ways in which they 'see' should accordingly take account of a number of phenomena.

First, perception is learnt; schemata are built up and modified through sensory experience and provide the individual with persistent and well-organised ways of classifying information and responding to it. Changes in perception, therefore, involve the formation of new schemata and the alteration of existing ones. For either of these to happen the learner must be presented at first hand or, vicariously, (for example, through speech) with new experiences or with alternative ways of seeing, interpreting and predicting. New material will, however, be accepted only if it is compatible with existing schemata or if the latter can be so modified as to incorporate it. Moreover, our knowledge, understanding and capacity to perceive form a consistent whole which must undergo some modification, however slight, when incorporating something new; it is impossible to acquire new ways of perceiving which do not affect the existing ones. In short, no fundamental changes in behaviour will result if individuals are not given the opportunity to assimilate proposed innovations and, if necessary, accommodate to them. The latter, in particular, is often a lengthy process.

Second, many schemata are formed through physical association, without verbalisation and, frequently, before the individual can talk. Such schemata or assumptions, being non-verbal and deeply-rooted, are particularly hard to raise to the level of consciousness and thus to discuss.

Third, since most of our perceptual habits are formed in childhood, learning is associated with dependency. Situations which encourage adult learners to be authority-dependent will increase the difficulty they

experience in accommodating to new ways of thinking and behaving.

Fourth, perceptual habits or perspectives are anchored in frames of reference which are shared with other people. The more we are supported in our basic assumptions, especially about ourselves, by the opinions of others whom we respect, love or admire, the less readily will we change them. Nor will we find it easy, independently, to sustain new ways of perceiving and judging. Changes in attitude necessitate the formation of new reference groups and, perhaps, the loss of old ones.

Fifth, it is not merely difficult but also painful to change fundamental mental structures or organisations of past experience. Basic assumptions, especially those which sustain an individual's sense of personal identity, are well-defended and challenge to them is often associated with feelings of fear, anxiety and loss of control. Since teachers tend to equate professional competence with 'being in control' they may find these feelings particularly uncomfortable.

Those who wish to change the teaching of themselves or others must recognise that the un-learning of established ways of perceiving and the learning and practice of new ones, is a lengthy, hard and potentially painful process in which the active participation, challenge and support of peers plays a crucial role. It is possible to imagine circumstances in which a single 'critical friend' could provide all the necessary stimulation, discussion and encouragement, but it is more likely that these will come most easily from a group of people who shared a common concern to reflect constructively upon their practice. Such a group will have certain characteristics. It must be small enough to permit all its members to communicate with one another but big enough to allow the expression of alternative viewpoints. It must be as egalitarian as possible, with members who are mutually supportive but ready to encourage challenge to authority and to tolerate disagreement, even conflict. Its aim will be to help individual members to accept responsibility for their own ideas, imaginings and actions, but also to work through any changes in these that they wish to make. It will be long enough in existence and meet sufficiently often for these developments to take place.

Many people could name examples of such groups; some teachers count themselves fortunate to have been members of one at some point in their careers (Nias 1986a). Frequently they occur in the interstices of our social and educational institutions and structures (e.g. self-help bereavement groups; drug or alcoholism clinics; unofficial curriculum development working parties) or, like the Women's Liberation Movement, have created structures of their own. Yet few have been studied in detail or set within a theoretical framework.

Theoretical studies of groups, especially as change agents for the individual, are usually to be found in social psychology or psychotherapy. This may be one reason why they have been relatively neglected by educationalists. In the first place, teaching in schools is an individualistic and isolated pursuit. As a result, many teachers reject out of hand any hint of group influence, feeling it to be tainted by implications of conformity and the infringement of personal autonomy. Second, to borrow from the literature on psychotherapy is to be guilty of suggesting that teachers are unbalanced, neurotic and in need of 'treatment'. Worse, the public image of treatment for mental health is often of procedures which deny

or abuse the individuality of the patient. Many teachers would probably feel it quite inappropriate to use the work of a practising psychotherapist as a model for educational change.

Nevertheless, in the next section I present the ideas of S. H. Foulkes, a psychotherapist who developed ways of working with groups which are proving of increasing theoretical and practical value to educationalists. His aim was not to change people, but to create the conditions under which they could understand themselves in relation to their social and historical contexts, examine alternative ways of thinking and behaving and change themselves if they chose to do so. At the same time he recognised that people needed one another because they are social beings used to living and operating in groups of all kinds and because, working together, they could support and challenge one another in ways which did not deepen their dependence on a single authority figure. Though he used groups for therapeutic purposes, his aims were, in the broadest sense, educational: what he sought was for each individual to learn, through interaction in a group, new ways of perceiving, interpreting and acting. Indeed, he claimed that the principles which he described were applicable to all forms of human group, not only therapeutic ones. He also argued that participation in a group, run along the lines that he advocated, was a desirable contribution to people's education as responsible citizens and that groups might provide a constructive way of tackling general problems of relationships between the individual and the community. Certainly, as I also describe in the next section, his ideas have been successfully used in higher education and on in-service courses with teachers. Their potential deserves further exploration.

The individual in the group: the work of S. H. Foulkes

When S. H. Foulkes held his first psychotherapeutic group in 1940 he felt a historic event had taken place in psychiatry. '"But", he added afterwards to his wife "nobody knows about it"' (de Maré 1983, p. 222).

Up to this time, psychotherapy had been dominated by the one-to-one relationship between psychoanalyst and patient. There had been various attempts to use groups, but in these the therapist normally either concentrated upon one individual at a time within the group, or upon the group as an entity. The distinctive contribution that Foulkes made was to treat the individual and the group as if they were inseparable and, in particular, to examine the dialectical nature of the relationship between them.

Foulkes stressed the social nature of man. We are all born into a primary group—the family—which shapes and socialises us, and are members of many other groups throughout our lives. It is impossible to conceive of an individual as separate from these networks of relationships. In adult life, they are likely to be complex: family, friends, companions, colleagues, rivals. The analogy which Foulkes used, drawing on the influence of his teacher, the neurologist Kurt Goldstein, was a biological one. Each of us is a nodal point in a network of nerve fibres. Any disturbance to one member of the network affects the organism as a whole and it reacts as a whole. Localised defects cause changes not just in specific neurological functions but also in the whole body; we live in a complex network of interdependencies. In other words, it is only within the individual's total situation that we can begin to understand his or her imaginings and actions. It is the group, rather than any one of its members, which forms the frame of reference within which the behaviour of the individual becomes intelligible.

The fact that we belong to these groups means that we are inseparable from them. 'Each individual—itself an artificial, though plausible, abstraction—is basically and centrally determined, inevitably, by the world in which he lives, by the community, by the group, of which he forms a part.' (Foulkes 1948, p. 10) 'This collective aspect permeates him all through . . . to his core' (p. 30) and indeed Foulkes saw no essential distinction between what was going on inside the group and outside it. Because of the way in which society penetrates its members, he saw 'inside' and 'outside' as false dichotomies. The first group to which most people belong is the family, and this shapes and socialises them to its own norms and values. At the same time, the family is itself suffused by, and

dependent upon, the other groups with which its members interact (e.g. at work, at worship, out shopping, at play, through the media). Thus,

> the nuclear family imbues and impregnates the individual, from his earliest phase of life and even before birth, with the total value system of the culture of which this family is part. In addition, each and every relationship within this family must be seen as reflecting the particular and specific family culture which is prevailing (Foulkes 1975, p. 60).

Individuality is inextricably linked with socialisation. It is from the social group that people derive their personalities and identities.

The social group is itself rooted in the past; we cannot escape our social and cultural inheritance. Indeed, Foulkes distinguished between the individual's 'vertical axis pointing to the past, to the parents, to the parents' own childhood, to the parents' relationship to their own parents' (Foulkes 1973, p. 216), and the horizontal axis of the individual's current social relationships. While it is important to understand the latter, it is also crucial to realise the role played by historical factors in shaping people, however unconscious they might be of this. We cannot then escape the social, cultural and historical nature of the present. Yet the relationship between the individual and group is a two-way process. Each person establishes a relationship with his or her context which is mutually influential and from which both draw meaning. The child affects the family just as powerfully as the family socialises the child. The two are held together in a state of 'dynamic equilibrium'. This, to Foulkes, was the creative form of adaptation to ever-changing circumstances which formed 'the hallmark of healthy life' (Foulkes 1948, p. 1). In his view, all social groups and organisations are perpetually involved in a process of mutual influence and transformation.

In stressing the interdependence of the individual and the group, and the dialectic nature of the relationship between them, Foulkes acknowledged (especially in Foulkes & Anthony 1965) his debt, not just to Goldstein, but also to the gestalt psychologists and in particular, to Kurt Lewin and his 'field theory'. Lewin, a German medical student, who moved on to the study of biology and later became a psychologist and, in America, an influential writer on group dynamics, was the first person to put forward the idea of the group as a dynamic whole operating in a social field. In Lewin's view, endorsed by Foulkes, the parts of an organism are interrelated in ways that are both cohesive and disruptive. Study and understanding of the parts will be enhanced by seeing them in relationship to the whole, but the whole cannot be inferred or reconstructed from its parts. Properties which belong to the individual cannot simply be transferred to the group (Foulkes & Anthony 1965). Moreover, 'in the social as in the physical field, the structural properties of a dynamic whole are different from the structural properties of the sub-parts. Both sets of properties have to be investigated' (Lewin quoted in Pines 1983, p. 267). So, although, in Lewin's terms, the figure can never be perceptually separated from its background, the observer may sometimes focus on the one, sometimes on the other. Always, however, he or she must be aware that they are interrelated and of the tension which both separates and draws them together.

Although the ideal would, therefore, be to study individuals in the full complexity of their natural social field, this is impracticable. We cannot

assemble anyone's total life group in order to observe the way its members interact. Moreover, since people have learnt to behave in particular ways in specific contexts, they are less likely to change their behaviour in the presence of those who have established expectations of them. So Foulkes advocated bringing together a group of strangers in the belief that each member, being innately conservative, especially in defence of the self, would try to 're-establish as far as possible the network in which he was originally shaped and in which he can function as he is' (Foulkes 1975, p. 61). Since each person is engaged in trying to elicit responses from and transmit messages to the others as if they were his or her family or other significant group, none of them is successful in doing this. All meet resistance from others: conflict may occur as an individual member tries to force others to conform to patterns of behaviour with which he or she is familiar and is met not just by their reluctance, but also by the fact that they too are simultaneously trying to make that member of the group fit in with their expectations. Severally and together they begin, as Foulkes (1975, p. 62) said, to '[force] decisive changes in experience and of behaviour' upon one another. This process Foulkes described as 'corrective interaction' and as 'ego-training in action'. He saw it as being 'the most powerful factor in bringing about change and the possibility for further and future progress after the group has ended' (Foulkes 1975, p. 63). In the struggle which results from members' attempts to recreate their own previous experience in the group, they have the opportunity to try out fresh responses, to discard defences which they no longer need, to adopt new behaviours. Often the first step is to see themselves in the 'mirror' of other people's eyes:

> A person sees himself, or part of himself . . . reflected in the interactions of other group members. He sees them reacting in the way he does himself, or in contrast to his own behaviour. He also gets to know himself . . . by the effect he has upon others and the picture they form of him (Foulkes 1964, p. 110).

Other less conscious processes also take place. For example, Foulkes saw members as 'tuning in' through the exchange of information with one another and enabling a sudden group understanding of unconscious phenomena which act as 'condensers' or amplifying, from their own experience, a theme raised by someone else ('resonating'). Whatever form it takes, 'corrective interaction' is always happening. Members are so closely linked together that they cannot avoid being powerfully affected by what is happening in any part of the group. Their perceptions, attitudes and actions are constantly 'encountering' those of other people. Indeed, it is these opposing realities which become the frame of reference for the understanding and interpretation of everything which goes on within the group, that is, for all the events and communications that take place and for the rules which govern members' behaviour.

It is therefore essential that no single member is perceived as more important than any other; rather, 'he is a fellow being on equal terms with the others' (Foulkes 1964, p. 33). No one should be allowed to use any hierarchical power or status in the group which may be enjoyed outside it. Foulkes was adamant that group members were of equal worth and that the group conductor should strive to sustain an egalitarian atmosphere within it. Similarly, no one person or alliance should be entitled to impose

their perceptions upon the rest of the group.

Equality is not enough, however. For change to occur in the individual or the group, members must be active participants and must take responsibility for their own development: 'Only what takes place inside the person's own mind can have any lasting effect upon him, can change him' (Foulkes 1948, p. 73). These changes Foulkes described as the 'liberation' of the individual (from unconscious patterns of behaviour to which he or she has become habituated during years of interaction in other groups). His ultimate aim was that all group members should become less fettered by, and dependent on, the responses learnt in their earlier social relationships and should develop, instead, the capacity to 'own' their own lives.

The group, or 'field' can be described in terms of communication as well as interaction, for individual members are connected to one another by communication. This is not a startling idea: after all, we are born into a network of communicative processes (verbal and non-verbal) and it is in large measure through communication with others, that we are socialised and learn about ourselves and our world. To continue Foulkes's biological analogy, without the network of the central nervous system we would cease to exist; unless this functions effectively the individual nodal point is impotent and to a large extent meaningless. As crucial parts of the network, its members send, receive and transmit messages, ceaselessy initiating, decoding, translating, interpreting—contributing constantly to the total vitality of the organism. 'In this sense . . . the processes [of communication are] not merely *interpersonal* but transpersonal, suprapersonal in a sense' and, 'We can imagine mental processes as penetrating the individuals which compose the group—going through them . . . and linking them up with each other' (Foulkes 1975, p. 63). In this sense communication is more than a process; it is also a necessary condition for the dynamic existence of the sum of the parts.

Indeed Foulkes saw communication, like participation in personal change, as an active process. He defined it as 'the necessity to formulate meaning for oneself and others, and at the same time to understand, receive, their formulations of their own problems as well as one's own, as seen through their eyes' (Foulkes 1948, p. 73). He accepted that it would not be easy to achieve mutual understanding but argued that each individual, whose experiences are to start with 'autistic and ununderstandable', must 'set to work again and again so long until he has transformed them into socially acceptable, articulate language' (p. 169) which can 'be understood and shared by all' (p. 135). In other words, '[to work] towards an ever more articulate form of communication' (p. 169) is to strive for greater mutual understanding in the group.

Foulkes felt that all the reactions, responses, comments, events which occurred in a group could be interpreted at several levels, from the superficial to the unconscious, and that one of the tasks of the group conductor was to ensure that all communications included 'the experience of every member in such a way that it can be shared and understood by the others, on whatever level it is first conveyed' (Foulkes 1964, p. 112). Ideally, however, 'the whole group should learn eventually to move over the full range of the scale' (Foulkes & Anthony 1965, p. 263) since every group member has the capacity to get better at communicating by learning to speak 'with more sophistication, subtlety and comprehension' (Pines 1983,

p. 277) and to deepen his or her understanding of others in the group. Communication is not, then, static or uniform. It changes in range and character with the needs and abilities of group members and in accordance with its content.

Communication is, of course, rooted in the experience of the group (including that which they bring into it from outside). It follows that the more actively members participate, the faster they will develop common understandings and a language with shared meanings, and the more they will be able to take part in a continuous cycle of reciprocal analysis, challenge, resolution and action. The aim of a group should, therefore, be full, free, unfettered communication based upon the highest possible level of mutual awareness (for the swift and sensitive transmission of messages) and the maximum interchange of information and interpretation.

Although he accepted non-verbal communication as part of this interchange, Foulkes attached a good deal of importance to speech. His aim was 'free floating' or 'free associative' discussions in which group members were urged to 'talk about anything which comes into your mind without selection' (Foulkes 1948, p. 71). He believed that everything could be symbolically represented in words and that it was through sharing words that a group developed its common understandings. In addition, he also saw language as a metaphor. Individuals have to learn their mother-tongue, using their own capacities and experience, but they learn the one that is spoken by their families which is, in turn, the shared property of the wider community. In the same way, other aspects of the external world become part of the individual's internal world, contributing to it and being changed by it. Members of a group, even of strangers, arrive in it sharing certain basic things of which language and the insights this gives into a common culture are the most important. This 'foundation matrix' is a symbol and a guarantee of the fact that even the inmost and idiosyncratic aspects of a person's life are not only shareable but are, in fact, already shared.

The common ground shared at its inception by the members of a group expands as a result and by means of further interaction. Everything that happens within the group, including incidents which take place outside it but whose influence extends through and into its members, becomes part of its history, culture and shared experience. Foulkes believed that members express their unconscious perceptions of themselves in relationship to others through all their verbal and non-verbal communications made in meeting after meeting. Internal and external reality merge for 'that which would conventionally be regarded as the inner world of the individual [is] revealed in the process of the group, and the group processes penetrating and transforming the inner life of each individual' (Lintott 1983, p. 246). These processes and the growing sense of integration which they engendered, Foulkes described as the 'dynamic matrix' of the group. This was at once the 'ground' against which the 'figure' of the individual could be interpreted and understood and the process which bound the parts of the network into a living, changing whole. As it constantly changed, grew and developed, it extended the understandings shared by members and thus the range and depth of their communication.

Content, structure and process were all integral to the matrix. Content grew from members' conscious preoccupations and perceptions and also from their 'social unconscious' (their social and cultural inheritance) and

the 'unconscious of the "here and now"' (Foulkes 1968, p. 63). The 'here and now', however, consisted not only of that which members chose to raise through the 'free association' of themes and ideas, but also of the way the group was structured (e.g. its sub-groups, alliances), the process of communication between its members and the effect that structure and process had upon each other. In other words, the content of the 'free-floating' discussion grew out of the matrix and became part of it.

It is difficult to over-emphasise the importance that Foulkes attached to communication and to verbal communication in particular. Everyone, he argued, unless neurologically impaired, has a latent capacity for speech and, therefore, for understanding others. Individuals are born into speaking communities and their socialisation is intimately connected with their learning and use of language. It is through communication that they internalise, make sense of and transform their world and their relationships within it. Communication enables them to reaffirm, strengthen, renew and extend the groups of which they are part. It also strengthens their membership of those groups. Within the therapeutic group, as they struggle to understand and be understood and thus to communicate more fully, they become better adjusted to the reality of others' worlds, less protected by their unconscious defences from 'corrective interaction' with their peers. As understanding grows, 'so there is a freeing of individual energies and potentialities which can now be used in the creative development of the group process and of the individual's own personal growth and change' (Foulkes 1948). Reciprocal communication—the growing ability to understand other people's realities and to express one's own in a way which they will comprehend—is, therefore, the key to the individual 'liberation and integration' which is the group conductor's aim (Foulkes 1948, p.vii). Moreover, the group itself depends for its existence upon its members' capacity to speak a common language: 'It [the group] can only grow by what it can share, and only share what it can communicate, and only "communicate" by what it has in "common" -e.g., in language' (Foulkes 1948, p. 31).

Communication is also related to the group's capacity to support individuals through the painful and difficult process of personal transformation. The greater and freer the communication, or, to put it another way, the more 'corrective interaction' that is taking place through the analysis of on-going behaviour and reaction, the less isolated individuals will feel and the more they will experience a sense of belonging and relief. Moreover, this is a self-reinforcing process. As members come to feel increasingly on equal terms with each other, so they enable one another to communicate still more freely. The group has an important part to play in supporting its members through painful periods and helping them to face irresolution, anxiety, conflict and reluctance to change. Their most effective tool in all of this is positive, constructive, open communication.

Behind much of what Foulkes felt and practised lay an optimistic view of human nature and in particular of social man. In 1948 he wrote (referring to both the individual and the group) 'The organism acts as if it knew its aim and had a choice as to the means to achieve this aim. It chooses those means which suit best all the prevailing conditions, inside itself or outside itself' (Foulkes 1948, p. 1). But, he also believed that 'the group has an inherent pull towards the socially and biologically established norm'

(Foulkes 1964, p. 90) and that the 'standards [of the group] are automatically the same as in life "outside" [it]' (Foulkes 1948, p. 31). He has been criticised for reifying the group in this way and for apparently denying its members the freedom to determine for themselves what constituted 'normal' or 'natural' (see Yalom 1970). Yet, as Pines (1983) makes clear,

> He was very far from meaning that this [the normative power of the group] meant adaptation to the superficial aspects of communal life. The type of social adjustment that he had in mind was one that would enhance each member's creative individuality and potentiality and . . . [increase his capacity for] spontaneity, sensitivity and . . . full emotional participation and relationships (p. 272).

He was insistent that groups enhanced rather than limited the potential of their members.

> The Group . . . respects and supports the emergence and free development of individuality, and Group treatment has nothing to do with making people uniformly march in step . Quite on the contrary . . . like a tree—the firmer it takes root [in the group] the freer it can display its individual characteristic beauty above ground (Foulkes 1948, p. 30).

As individuals pool their insights, the collective knowledge and consciousness of the group grows, to exceed the capacity of any single member until, 'collectively they can do what individually they fall short of' (Foulkes 1948, p. 170). Yet the uniqueness of the individual is unimpaired; it is, after all, only in relation to others that we can see ourselves as different. Just as our finger-prints, when compared with those of others, make each of us distinctive, so, in a group, we always retain through our differences the essence of our individuality. 'A good group . . . breeds and develops, creates and cherishes that most precious product: *the human individual*' (Foulkes 1948, p. 170). In short, Foulkes seems almost to have believed that a group could be trusted if it were set up and run in the manner he described, to do what was best for its members, and, equally, the individual could be trusted to seek his or her own liberation and growth within it. Given these views and the stress which Foulkes laid upon the wholeness of the group and the equal status of its members, it is not surprising that he should have played down the importance of the group leader. Indeed, he felt that the very term had fascist overtones, and preferred the word 'conductor'. To be sure, he asserted the need for the leader's authority as a necessary condition for free communication, and claimed that he 'continuously leads the group, directs the group, although from behind the scenes, as it were' (Foulkes 1948, p. 153). But the leader has authority in order to 'wean the group from such Authority' (Foulkes 1948, p. 154). His obligation is to assist in the integration of the group, to encourage its independence from himself, to enable members to help one another and to facilitate their active participation. Certainly, he 'has a lot to do in helping the hard-pressed ego . . . in its struggle for liberation' (Foulkes 1975, p. 62), but this responsibility is shared with other members of the group. Overall, he should see himself as the servant and instrument of the group, fitting in with them as they are and following their lead (though with discrimination, so that he is occasionally prepared to take a directive role if he feels that the group needs this).

To these ends, he does not often exert his authority and never imposes his views or plans the group's strategies. He does however listen, helps

to create an atmosphere of tolerance and an appreciation of individual differences and provides a model of facilitative behaviour. Above all, he promotes full and free communication within the group and active participation in this by every member. So, as the group becomes more integrated, he leaves it to them to deal with the disruptive tendencies of individuals rather than letting them rely on him to do this for them, and sometimes he withholds his own knowledge, waiting instead for the group to create its own solution to a shared problem. Most particularly 'he treats all communications alike and with equal respect, continuously helps the Group to see the significance and value of all sorts of communications, even the smallest and most trivial remarks, and to analyse all resistances interfering with free expression' (Foulkes 1948, p. 72). As Abercrombie (1983) put it:

> It was the way Dr Foulkes behaved in a group (Foulkes 1975, chapter 6) that I found most helpful in establishing a climate conducive to learning about one's own mental processes and how to monitor them. The climate must be supportive, so that members are encouraged to talk freely and to listen to each other. Everything that happens in the group is regarded as meaningful and relevant—nothing that is said is silly, stupid or beside the point. The conductor avoids dominating the conversation with frequent and long speeches, speaks tentatively, not dogmatically, tolerates silences for contemplation, and leaves it to others to break a silence unless anxiety builds up too strongly (p. 14).

Yet, if the leader really enters the group or groups he will be taxed and exposed mercilessly and there will be no chance of escape . No wonder it raises anxieties in the therapist. If, however, he has overcome in himself the claim to perfection and he is not afraid to be found wanting, imperfect and ignorant, he can allow himself to be honest and sincere and stand firm on the grounds of reality. In doing so he exerts by his own example the most valuable and potent therapeutic influence. (Foulkes & Anthony 1965). Yalom (1970 p. 101) quotes Foulkes's mature leader as saying to his group, 'Here we are together facing reality and the basic problems of human existence. I am one of you, not more and not less'. As a consequence of this stance, the leader also has to learn to accept the hostility that often results from members' discomfort at the non-authoritarian leadership role. It is not an easy position and one which is the more difficult for anyone who is accustomed to playing a traditional leadership role.

Foulkes's ideas have been used in educational work with adults, though relatively few written accounts of these activities exist. Abercrombie was the first person deliberately to translate his notions of individual change within and through the group, into teaching. How Foulkes came to influence Abercrombie is best described in her own words.

> As a teacher of zoology I had been disappointed in the effects that learning about science seemed to have on habits of thinking . . . It was found that students who had satisfied the examiners for the Higher School Certificate . . . were well grounded in the facts of biology, physics and chemistry, [but] did not necessarily use scientific ways of thinking to solve problems presented in a slightly new way. They might be able, for instance, to recite all the lines of evidence for the theory of evolution but yet be unable to use this material to defend the theory in argument with an anti-evolutionist. They might know what the function of a certain organ is believed to be, but did not always know why, nor did they clearly understand on what kind of evidence a belief

> of that sort was based. When asked to describe what they saw in dissecting an animal, or in looking through a microscope, they often did not distinguish sufficiently sharply between what was there and what they had been taught 'ought' to be there. The effect on students of two or three years' teaching at the University was no more encouraging. It seemed that scientific ways of thinking did not automatically result from learning the facts of science and that a more radical approach to training was necessary . . .
>
> After the war [I became involved in medical education]. By this time, realizing that some of these difficulties of 'being scientific' were related to general attitudes or personal predispositions, I had begun to teach through discussion among small groups of students. This involved . . . a different relationship between teacher and student, and between students, than is usual in University teaching. I soon encountered opposition aroused by the unfamiliarity of the situation, ranging from polite expression of disapproval or bewilderment to scarcely veiled, or even open, hostility. By good chance, I commented to a colleague that this behaviour resembled that of patients in group psychotherapy I had seen reported, and through him I was introduced to a psychiatrist who invited me to see a therapeutic group he was then conducting. This was an illuminating experience for me, and I felt that if one could transfer to a teaching group something of the atmosphere he had established in this therapeutic group, new ways of seeing and thinking might be encouraged. I therefore joined a therapeutic group conducted by Dr S. H. Foulkes, and during some five years of this experience, and of many discussions on group analytic psychotherapy with Dr Foulkes and his associates, I learnt a few simple skills that could be applied to teaching (Abercrombie 1969, pp. 15–17).

Abercrombie (1981) has provided detailed and fully documented examples of three projects in higher education in which 'people were learning to inquire into their own assumptions, attitudes and habits and to modify them if they did not produce the results they intended' (p. 54), particularly since many of these assumptions 'were developed in earlier times in response to needs now outgrown . . . [which] form a barrier to change of behaviour in response to current needs' (p. 38). Her aims in these projects (and in other smaller, less fully-reported ventures) were to increase the autonomy and responsibility of learners by causing them to question their basic assumptions, and to participate actively in their own learning and that of others, to reduce their authority-dependence, to increase discussion between peers as a means of teaching and learning, to improve practice by integrating it with theory and to encourage, in the interests of learning, the integration of the academic and the personal—in short, 'to help each participant to understand his own behaviour and acquire better control over it' (p. 52).

The first project, with medical students, is fully reported in Abercrombie (1969); the second with architecture students in Abercrombie (1974); the third, on improving small-group teaching in universities, in Abercrombie and Terry (1978, 1979). All three are also described in detail in Abercrombie and Terry (1979) and more briefly in Abercrombie (1983). In addition, accounts of her work with teachers, inspired by the same aims and using the same methods, appear in Abercrombie and Terry (1979) and Lintott (1986).

Abercrombie's work is important not just because she provides accounts of teaching which is emancipatory rather than instructional in intent, but also because she modified the ideas of Foulkes to suit an educational

context. She was a teacher; her aim was not to heal but to increase the intellectual and professional potential of her students. She believed, however, this was often limited by unconscious behaviour. 'Most of us could improve the usefulness of our own brain by understanding a little better how it works . . . our conscious behaviour is in part controlled by unconscious processes. Only when we can recognize these can we control them more closely' (Abercrombie 1984a, p. 1).

She accepted Foulkes's proposition that it is in a group of people meeting regularly and communicating freely that we can learn about our own unconscious processes, by comparing our perceptions with those of others and by 'corrective interaction' with them. We can also discover what there is in our present social relationships and the influences of the past upon us which cause us to think and behave as we do. We can recognise 'the mismatch between perception of the self in relation to others and one's effectiveness in life-tasks, and consequent self-modification to get a better fit' (Abercrombie 1984a, p. 10).

Like Foulkes she felt the uncovering and modification of 'basic assumptions' can best be done by using 'associative discussion'. This was not totally 'free', however. In education, as distinct from psychotherapy, the most fruitful starting point is often some topic to do with members' own work or professional lives (Abercrombie 1983, 1984a; Lintott, 1986). For example, in a course for teachers on 'Leadership and Communication in the Staff Group' which she helped to design, individuals started their groups off each week by reporting on some aspect of their own school situation. The ensuing discussion enabled many of them to understand their own preconceptions and perceptions and in a number of instances to change them. It also proved useful to begin each group session by recalling what had been discussed the previous week, as this emphasised individual differences and enabled topics to be 'revisited' in a fresh way (Lintott 1986).

Although the starting point in learning groups may be occupational, Abercrombie reminded us that other aspects of students' lives should have an equal place within the discussion if the inclusion of them would help individuals towards self-understanding and the modification of their practice. She disclaimed as artificial and sterile, teaching methods which maintained a strict distinction between content which the teacher felt to be important (because, for example, it appeared on a syllabus) and that which was significant to the learner. In the same way, she stressed the individual's need for support in learning and showed that associative discussion can take place most easily when the atmosphere of the group encourages it; that is, when it facilitates individual contributions, enables communication and the negotiation of mutual understanding and offers support to those involved in personal change.

Like Foulkes she felt that leaders play a crucial role in all these processes. With him she also argued that they must be prepared, as leaders in, rather than of the group, to make themselves equal members within it and so to be open to hostility, comment and interpretation from other participants. Moreover, agreeing with Foulkes that education of self and others takes place only as a result of individual struggle and endeavour, she stressed that the group is likely to need the leader's example of resilience while this is occurring. Indeed, she was far less ambivalent than

Foulkes about the notion of a group leader, arguing instead that the teacher can offer students, through his or her own behaviour, alternative models of the learning process. In addition, since much formal education inculcates in learners attitudes of authority-dependence, she felt that the group is likely to begin by investing the teacher with a considerable amount of authority. The latter, therefore, has the delicate task of gradually abrogating this authority to the group while initially using it to protect and encourage full, unfettered, active participation by every member.

In Abercrombie (1984b) she explored the practical consequences of these ideas for the discussion leader or teacher.

> The main job of the leader is to establish a climate in which all participants can listen and speak. The room should be quiet and comfortable (but not conducive to sleep) with similar chairs arranged in a circle, so that participants can see each other. Some feel happier with a table to put papers and their elbows on, but the Board Room look (long narrow rectangular table with a special high chair for the leader) should be avoided.
>
> The leader must be wholly committed to the group and its work, never be late, or called away, or interrupted by his secretary or the telephone. He leads the group unobtrusively, largely by non-verbal means. He talks little, but his comments show that he has heard, considered and remembered what others have said.
>
> He establishes and keeps the boundaries for the group, offering a clearly drawn structure for it timewise. He starts on time, realising that a person 5 minutes late who keeps the group waiting costs it 5 minutes per person—say 40 minutes. He acknowledges the late arrival by a nod or grin, but does not let him hold up business. And he ends the group on time unless he has had its permission to carry on. He tries to keep to the agenda, or at least calls the group's attention to serious lapses from it. He warns the group when time is running out and helps it to rearrange the agenda if necessary.
>
> Members should introduce themselves at the beginning of a new group, giving their name, job, and reasons for being there. Some shy people don't like doing this, but at least it allows them and others to hear their voice. Perhaps the leader should begin, in order to show the way, to set the pace and length of statement. I find that a group which is going to meet several times gets off to a good start if time is spent at first in paired interviews, one member then introducing his interviewee to the group. Some find it easier than introducing themselves at considerable length. The leader suggests they ask any questions that will give them information useful for working together—including why the interviewee came to the group, with what expectations, what he most looked forward to, and was most frightened of.
>
> There are no fools in his group, and the leader shows no favouritism. Two kinds of participant may offer him special difficulties—the silent, and the over-talkative. Both of these can be controlled partially by non-verbal clues—the silent by perhaps an enquiringly raised eyebrow, indicating to him that the leader wants to know what he thinks. The over-talkative may quail if the leader fails to reward him by giving him signals of approval, by avoiding looking at him, nodding the head, and subsequently quoting him. If a silent person does speak, he can be encouraged further perhaps by later reference to the substance of his remark, not necessarily giving his name. When there is a gap in conversation, the leader might suggest that anybody who has not had a chance to give their opinion can do so now.
>
> The leader must learn to allow for different sorts of silence—the reflective, the anxious, embarrassed or puzzled. He should not be afraid of saying what he is feeling himself, and should not let silence stretch too long. He

> must be prepared to summarize discussion when useful, and ask if others' impressions agree with his opinion. He occasionally attempts to clarify discussion when necessary and compares and contrasts the positions stated by members of the group. He doesn't hesitate to express his bewilderment at times, knowing that others will share this.
>
> At the end, he should recapitulate briefly what has happened in the session, note any decisions taken, and give the time and place of the next meeting and indicate the work to be done. He is the servant of the group and he will have served it well if people leave the session feeling satisfied with the work done, supported and exhilarated by the group, and anticipating the next meeting with pleasure (Abercrombie 1984b, pp. 1–2).

It was one of her main contributions to draw attention, even more strongly than Foulkes had done, to the painful and frightening effect upon individuals of 'corrective interaction' with their peers, of the questioning by themselves and others of their basic assumptions, and of accepting the socio-historical reasons for these and changing their behaviour in the light of their new learning. She stressed the importance of support during these readjustments from both the teacher and fellow-learners.

> The course brought the student face to face with the need for continual change in himself, if he is to take in more of the information available to him. In some circumstances, such a message could be so painful that it would be rejected. I regard a lot of my work in the discussions as directed to making it acceptable. The aim was to make it possible for the student . . . to find a new kind of stability (Abercrombie 1969, p. 171).

By the same token, Abercrombie played down the conflict and resistance which Foulkes saw as inevitable. This is not to say that she felt learning in groups was easy or proceeded smoothly, without the expression of differences in personality, outlook or ideology. Indeed, in her writings and her practice she accepted that learners would often manifest anger, frustrated by their inability to force their own perceptions on others, by the apparently passive role of the teacher or by their own feelings of confusion and anxiety. She was, however, more interested in helping students to make constructive use of their differences than in facilitating the expression of conflict; more concerned with the learning that could go on in educational groups than with the healing, which was the overt purpose of therapeutic ones. She learnt from Foulkes that group members would often offer strong resistance to one another's interpretations and perspectives, but saw the expression of emotion as a means to the improvement of intellectual judgment and professional skill.

Since her aims were overtly educational, she argued that 'corrective interaction' which has learning as its aim can take place most effectively not, as Foulkes advocated for psychotherapy, in a group of strangers, but among colleagues. If colleagues are involved together in reflection, experimentation and action, they are more likely to transfer what they have learnt to their work-situation and to spread the possibility of further change within it. Similarly, work with teachers (Lintott 1986) has suggested that the leader need not be a stranger to the group, that he or she should often be 'steeped in the . . . [occupational] micro-climate of the group, the department, the institution, should be aware of the conceptual and attitudinal problems of the . . . [work] and sensitive to the larger context of . . . [occupational] thought' (Abercrombie 1984a, p. 15).

Evidence exists in writings and in the in-service courses, incorporating

Abercrombie's ideas, that the therapeutic theories of Foulkes can be used to help adults engage in what another adult educator has described as 'perspective transformation' (Mezirow 1981). Such courses do, however, have limitations as vehicles by which teachers may be enabled to change the ways they teach. First, they are frequently provided by higher education institutions or school advisory services and therefore tend to carry with them a sense of dependency (e.g. for time, material resources, status, recognition, promotion) which is antithetical to the development of the type of group advocated by both Foulkes and Abercrombie. This is particularly the case when a tradition exists that in-service work will be award-bearing and therefore subject to assessment. Second, they succeed only when teachers who join them understand in advance the nature of the course (that it will be based upon their own experience and their discussion of this) and accept that these activities are a worthwhile use of their time. Yet the latter condition is particularly hard to meet. Teachers who have always been passive receptors rather than active creators of professional knowledge, often need considerable persuasion that they can learn from their peers, let alone from themselves. Yet unless they can be so persuaded, a vicious circle is perpetuated: the more they perceive professional development as something which lies in hands other than their own, the more they will look to 'experts' for the improvement of their practice and the less ready they will be to 'own' their own expertise. Third, it is notoriously difficult for individuals to transfer the experience they have gained during a course which takes place away from their workplace and in the absence of all or most of their colleagues, back into their institutions. Finally, if associative discussion groups are run only under the umbrella of in-service provision, they are likely to be available to a minority of teachers. It would not in this case really matter how effective the courses were, for, under existing levels of funding and availability, they would reach only a few teachers and their impact on the educational system as a whole would therefore be minimal.

In short, while in-service courses are one way of enabling teachers to gain access to 'free discussion groups', they are likely to affect the majority of teachers only if those with experience of the groups see their value and press for them to be available in schools. In the next section, I suggest some of the characteristics of teaching as an occupation and schools as organisations which make it unlikely that this will happen without associated changes in attitude and structure. I then argue that groups similar to those used by Foulkes and Abercrombie already informally exist within schools and that their role as change agents could quite easily be extended.

'Free' discussion groups in schools

In the first section I suggested that teachers were more likely than some other occupational groups to find it difficult to change their perspectives because of the emphasis placed within the profession upon 'feeling in control', both of yourself as a teacher and of the classroom. In addition, teachers often have other occupational characteristics which militate against their use of formally-constituted 'free associative discussion' groups as vehicles for personal change. In particular, I wish to single out the authority-dependency of many teachers, their relative inability to listen to one another and the reluctance they display to engage in inter-staff disagreement, especially over fundamental aims and values. Further, the nature of schools as organisations places obstacles in the way of their use as part of a strategy for staff development. Nevertheless, such groups sometimes become informally established and teachers themselves bear witness to their power as change-agents. It is an open question whether these groups, whose growth at present appears to depend upon a randomly determined combination of people and buildings, can be fostered in sufficient numbers to be an effective part of school policies without destroying the characteristics which give them the value they evidently now possess.

To turn first to authority-dependency: Abercrombie (1981) points out that the human race spends nine months in the womb and a further ninety years trying to achieve independence while maintaining attachment. Our long childhood, during which we are fed and physically cared for and the fact that we have to learn most of our survival knowledge from adults or older siblings encourages an unconscious dependency upon those who are bigger, stronger or older than we are. It will also result in ambiguities in our feelings towards them. In small families these dependencies are often aggravated by the absence of siblings of an intermediate age and of other but younger adults (cousins, uncles, etc) who in extended families can provide a model of growing independence and of teaching which is not linked to hierarchical authority.

Dependency is likely to be particularly strongly associated with instruction, and especially academic learning, because it is perpetuated by the way much formal education is organised and carried out. When we are young, our teachers are bigger, more powerful, more responsible than we are. As we grow taller and stronger, they are still backed by the power of the institution and, in addition, may appear to be wiser or more clever than we are . At all ages, the social sanction which is given to 'school knowledge' (as opposed to common sense, everyday knowledge) and the

fact that this is, by definition, vested in schools, colleges or universities, stresses the dependence of the learner upon the teacher. As we pass through the educational system we are likely, unconsciously, to acquire the assumption that information comes from above, downwards.

If this assumption is unchallenged, people who become teachers are likely to perpetuate it; the only thing to have changed is their position in the transmission process. They expect to be in authority because they are authorities. The unconscious assumption that learning results from a downwards process of instruction continues unchecked and shapes teachers' reactions when they are faced with the need to acquire new knowledge or skills. Indeed, in my experience many teachers are initially very uneasy in learning situations which do not allow them to be dependent upon 'experts'. To be sure, there is evidence (Lortie 1975) that when teachers need practical help or 'tricks of the trade' they turn to their peers rather than their superiors, although beginning teachers often seek out a more senior colleague as a 'professional parent' (Nias 1984b). But even from this trusted person, they want technical assistance and not discussion of underlying principles or new perspectives. As one teacher said of his first school: 'It was a good place to start because it was full of certainties' (Nias 1986a). In day-to-day matters teachers are willing to seek peer help and support but in new or more formal learning situations they apparently prefer to perpetuate a vertical view of educational relationships.

The twin assumptions that those in authority possess important knowledge and that learning passes downwards from them are reinforced by the hierarchical and age-related nature of many schools and educational systems. The view, often expressed by parents, that teachers who have acquired additional formal qualifications are now entitled to teach older pupils dies hard in many communities. Further, the resources of the educational system are distributed in such a way that younger children receive less than older ones (e.g. in terms of pupil–teacher ratios, space and capitation allowances). Inside schools, teaching posts are often graded and certain posts are usually seen to be endowed with more authority than others. We speak of 'heads' of schools, departments, faculties. Even in school systems where much curricular responsibility is devolved, some teachers or administrators are perceived as having the right to define reality for others. Authority-dependency is sanctioned and affirmed by the structures within which most teachers work.

Yet it is also accompanied by feelings of ambivalence both towards holding authority and towards being dependent upon other, more senior colleagues. In a recent management course at the Cambridge Institute of Education, senior teachers from all types of school named the topics with which they most needed help when dealing with their colleagues. These were 'delegation','accepting the authority of others', 'exercising authority' and 'combining authority with caring'. They found it hard, they said, to part with any of their power, to share it with others, to accept the authority of others particularly when the latter were not hierarchically senior to them but held specific posts of responsibility, which impinged on their domains. But they also had difficulty in being authoritative without being authoritarian, sometimes even in regarding their power over peers as legitimate. In other words, though they held positions of authority which they had voluntarily sought, they were not easy in the

despatch of their duties, as these affected their colleagues. Those who embraced their formal authority enthusiastically found it difficult to give any of it away, to deal with challenges to it or to combine the distance of position with the closeness of concern. Those who were uneasy about holding power over other adults, disliked giving reproofs, issuing orders or being what they described as 'bossy'. Other kinds of ambivalence also exist. On a similar course one headteacher said, 'I suppose you could put it this way: I've got all the power in my school and I love it, but I've got all the responsibility, and it's killing me'. It was some time before he was willing to accept the view of some other course members that his own health and that of the school might be improved if he shared both with his colleagues.

I referred in the first section to teachers' need to feel in control. The second occupational characteristic which militates against their use of formally constituted 'free associative discussion' groups as vehicles for personal change, is their relative inability to listen to one another: they find it easier to talk than to listen. There are now a multitude of studies (Hammersley 1974, 1976 are good examples) which demonstrate the way in which teachers use their power to talk in the classroom to control pupils' learning and social interaction. Equally there are many studies which emphasise how much teachers talk in the classroom and by implication, the extent to which they equate speaking with teaching. Ashton (1975) emphasises that this behaviour spills into the staffroom; primary teachers find it difficult to discuss professional matters with their colleagues. They make statements and describe their own viewpoints, but do not readily listen and respond to one another. In a recent study of an American elementary school, Weinkert (1985, in a personal communication from the University of California) makes the same point, claiming that in eighteen months he never heard teachers discussing educational matters. Instead each told the others what he or she 'knew' and no modifications of opinion resulted.

Teachers' need to feel in control and their reluctance to listen to one another may relate to a final occupational attribute which is particularly marked in small, usually primary, schools—that is, a tendency to prefer agreement to disagreement; to avoid open conflict among adults. In Nias (1972) I argued that teacher-training institutions in England have historically been expected to undertake simultaneously, and with inadequate resources, a number of mutually incompatible tasks (elementary academic instruction, induction into a humanistic, classical educational tradition, or a 'progressive' child-centred view of teaching and learning, character-building and moral training, mastery of the techniques of mass instruction). Yet, as small institutions they have been reluctant to tolerate the social discomfort of deep-rooted dissension among their staff. The results, certainly until the reorganisation of teacher education in the 1970s, were that specific but irreconcilable aims were subsumed into general ones with which all could agree (e.g. that students should learn to 'put the children's interests first' or that 'good relationships matter'). There has never been a tradition, in English colleges of education, of thrashing out philosophical differences or educational priorities, when to do this would result in intellectual conflict. This may perhaps relate also to the fact that the philosophical traditions from overseas which have affected teacher edu-

cation in England have been those of Rousseau, Froebel and Dewey rather than of Hegel and Marx. Naturalism, pragmatism and a metaphysical search for unity and harmony have been much more influential than dialecticism in shaping the education of most primary and many secondary teachers.

The tendency to define disagreement as a destructive and dangerous force rather than as a source of creative tension is echoed, in infant schools, by what King (1978) has described as the myth of 'childhood innocence'. Teachers see children as born good, but corrupted by their environments; they therefore fail to notice anything which might shake them in this belief. Children who, for example, swear or fight do so because of their home backgrounds and not because of any innate capacity for unpleasant behaviour. Moreover, teachers exclude from school, as far as they can, any attitudes or actions which might spoil the innocence of the pupils in their care. What seems to happen in the process is that the open expression of negative emotions—such as anger, resentment, jealousy—are proscribed among adults as well as children. In addition, the 'status culture' (King 1978) of infant teachers is so powerful that most can take certain basic assumptions (about, for example, children, teaching, learning, motivation, relationships) for granted in their colleagues. There is no need for discussion of certain principles since it is assumed without question that everyone accepts them. Disagreement about ends and the expression of related emotions is therefore seen as unnecessary as well as antipathetic to the culture of the school.

Furthermore, English teachers have been, and to a large extent still are, trained to work with children in classrooms, not with adults in schools. They are given little understanding of schools as institutions or preparation for negotiation or conflict-resolution among their colleagues. The myth tends to be perpetuated, by omission, that schools are places in which adults work harmoniously and without fundamental disagreements. When such differences (e.g. in aim) occur, they are normally resolved, at least on the surface, by reference to authority; it is the educational administrator, principal or head of department who has the right to decide which view shall prevail. So, when conflict does take place, as inevitably it does given the different frames of reference individual teachers use, few mechanisms exist for dealing constructively with it. The desire to suppress disagreement because it is not philosophically in tune with the traditions of the profession is strengthened by the absence of structures for expressing it. As a result, many school staffs overlook differences of opinion rather than discussing them and attempting to resolve them. Potential conflict is treated as a pathological symptom rather than as a natural phenomenon which occurs in all groups and institutions, the resolution of which can lead to personal and collective growth.

The influence of occupational characteristics such as these is increased by the nature of schools as organisations. It is a commonplace comment on schools that teachers are short of time (Fullan 1982). Without the provision of extra resources it is hard to see how groups of teachers could find time within school hours to meet for discussion regularly, consistently and without interruption. Out-of-school meetings can be scheduled, but, because they rely on individual goodwill, it is often difficult to ensure regular attendance. Much depends upon the enthusiasm and commitment

of particular people and these are often the ones who are already involved in other activities. Perhaps we need simply to accept that there will never be enough time for teachers to do everything they need and want to—it is a question of priorities. If teachers, principals and administrators felt that it was really important for practitioners to discuss their work with one another and that improvements in schooling would result from such discussion, I suspect they would use initiative, imagination and influence to make it possible for them to do this.

Similarly, if educational policy and decision-makers saw professional talk, in a critical but supportive collegial group, as an essential part of staff development, they might try harder than they do at present to provide time for it within the working day. The implication is that people at all levels of the educational system need to be constantly made aware of the value of teacher-teacher interaction (see, e.g. Elliott's (1977) & Ebbutt & Elliott's (1985) accounts of collaborative action research into teaching) and, in particular, of regular interaction in small groups.

In addition, the organisation of schools, especially large secondary ones, frequently impedes the development in schools of discussion groups representing varied perspectives. In schools which are tightly organised into departments or faculties, it may be difficult to bring teachers together across curriculum boundaries. Buildings and timetables often make it hard for teachers to find anyone to talk to with confidence who is not already part of their organisational group. Even in big schools, teachers may be protected from challenge by the ways in which diversity of opinion is contained within existing structural boundaries. Where hierarchical organisation predominates, discussion may be easiest to arrange among peers, but for this very reason it is likely not to represent the views of those from different organisational levels. Other, more subtle factors operate too. The professional isolation of teachers is notorious (see, e.g. Lortie 1975; Hargreaves 1980; Nias 1984b). Beyond this, occupational sub-cultures separate teachers from one another. In primary schools, for example, infant and junior trained teachers may occupy the same staffroom but seldom talk to each other; in secondary schools the teachers of practical subjects may use different parts of the school building (even in breaks) from their more academic colleagues and the divisions implicit in school mergers may be perpetuated for years by patterns of interaction in the new school. Some schools do have organisational devices (e.g. ad hoc working parties; open-membership committees) which enable teachers from different sectional interests, hierarchical levels and reference groups to meet, if they choose to take this opportunity, for discussion and decision making. Others achieve similar results by recruiting for diversity of aims and opinions rather than uniformity, or, from time to time, by re-shaping teams or arranging for the exchange of responsibilities. Teachers might appreciate more readily the value of mutual challenge and the potential for individual growth contained in the expression of multiple realities, if schools were organised to expose their members to diversity and heterogeneity. To the fact that teachers are often protected from challenge by the structure and organisation of their schools is added the need which we all feel to have our basic assumptions confirmed by our reference groups. In the first section I argued that primary teachers perceive their job as being imbued with values, that their sense of personal identity is

deeply involved with these values and that as a matter of priority they seek reference groups which will reaffirm both values and sense of self. When they find such a group within a school it increases their job-satisfaction, isolates them from the rest of their colleagues and protects them from conflicting attitudes and opinions. It is likely that reference groups in secondary schools operate in the same way and serve similar functions. In short, reference groups are more likely to deflect their members from self-understanding and the adoption of new identities than they are to promote reflection and personal change.

The fact that teachers normally talk (other than at a superficial level) only to those who already share their own fundamental attitudes and assumptions, makes it more difficult for them to communicate when they do meet. There is a tendency for groups of teachers with different value systems to avoid grappling, in their initial meetings, with matters that are important to them and for discussion to centre at first upon trivial or technical matters (Lintott 1986). I have found, during a decade of working with experienced teachers on in-service courses, that they are not merely unaccustomed to learning from each other, but that they also find it hard to comprehend what others are saying unless the views expressed are similar to those which they are used to hearing. They are more ready to listen to alternative perspectives and to question their own assumptions if they have had some previous experience of doing so.

Widespread authority-dependency, especially in matters relating to school, ambivalence (often unexpressed) towards authority-figures, the need to feel in control, to talk rather than listen, to suppress conflict and deny negative emotions, teachers' perpetual lack of time and their tendency to spend what time they do have for interaction with their colleagues in the company of those who reinforce rather than challenge their perspectives—all these occupational characteristics are reinforced by school hierarchies and by the divided, isolated and bureaucratic nature of the educational system. Small wonder that it is sometimes hard to persuade teachers that their self-understanding, personal growth and collective well-being would be enhanced if they committed themselves to talking on a regular basis to their colleagues, in egalitarian but heterogenous groups, about their professional experience. Indeed, I would argue that formal attempts to set up such groups within schools, and especially within the working day, are most unlikely to succeed without drastic changes in educational structures and organisation and in teachers' attitudes.

A final problem is that of leaders. Apart from logistical questions of supply, organisation, cost and scheduling, how can one reconcile a 'free' discussion group's need for a leader who is its instrument and servant with the occupational characteristics I have just described? There may well be a shortage of teachers who are equipped by temperament or professional experience to be such leaders and who are available to take on this role, since they are likely already to be committed to other types of collaborative work within their schools.

It could then be argued that I have been wasting my time and my readers' in suggesting that educational change should be conceptualised as helping teachers to gain more control over their unconscious behaviour and that the best vehicle for achieving this is the 'free' discussion group,

in which each member is committed to increasing reciprocal communication and understanding. There are, I think two answers to this objection. I have already shown in the second section how these groups have been successfully used in higher education and in in-service courses for teachers. A second possible solution is more tentative, but perhaps in the long run more hopeful: groups already flourish in an informal and largely unrecognised fashion in the interstices of school organisations and their development could be fostered. I recently interviewed forty-five mid-career teachers about their lives and careers (Nias 1986a, 1986b). Among the topics in which I was interested were motivation, job-satisfaction, professional development and change. I was continually struck by the important role played by collegial challenge and support in the lives of many of them, and particularly of those who were aware of having at some point modified or drastically changed their educational views. Over and over again, when I asked them why they had altered their practice or adopted a new perspective, they described a group of colleagues with whom they had frequently talked and whose support they had valued. These groups almost always arose accidentally, through a happy coincidence of people, space and/or organisation of teaching groups. They were small (between three and eight), combined some degree of homogeneity (e.g. of gender, perspective, age-group taught) with a good deal of heterogeneity; members saw each other as equals, felt secure in each other's company, talked openly, freely and often, and shared certain professional understandings. Sometimes, but not always, there was one member who assumed the role of leader. The description given by one primary teacher (with fifteen years' experience of teaching) of the group which was to her 'probably the most important and formative experience I've ever had' is typical. Her account of it is paraphrased from an interview reported in further detail in Nias (1986a):

> It started with the principal, though she didn't seem to do much—indeed in some respects she seemed quite lazy, but that was good because it made us take the initiative and get on with it. Then she just let it happen. What she did, though, was always to support us—she made us feel secure. She made us feel good about ourselves; it was the first time I'd ever met anyone who said teaching was important and teachers were great.
>
> There were six of us, seven with the principal, and although she was principal of the whole school she seemed one of us. We all worked down the same end of the school [building] to start with, but not afterwards. I can't remember how we came together as a group, but I'm sure it's important that none of us was hung up on status or role. One of the people we learnt most from was a welfare assistant . . . we were all willing to learn from each other, ready to take on other people's roles and to try and see things from their point of view. It was very important that we didn't feel the need to compete. Somewhere along the way we lost the need to defend ourselves to each other, our egos stopped being important. You weren't afraid any more of making a fool of yourself and you could admit when things were going badly. I felt absolutely secure in that group. I suppose we all did which is one main reason why it was so important. You could be completely open.
>
> I can't really say how it worked—it was 'organic'; if that doesn't sound silly. It just happened. It was important that we all shared certain values—mostly that we all took the job seriously and wanted to do it well, but also that we had the same basic ideas about it. But we didn't agree about everything. You influence each other. I changed my views on corporal punishment,

but stuck my ground on competition and brought the others with me—which was hard because we were all brought up to be competitive and our children are competitive too.

I suppose that's where the openness comes in. If you're a group, and one or two members change their minds or have a new idea then you all change a little, otherwise you don't stay a group. That's why it is good if new people come in . . . [a new teacher] joined us one year, and she was very different to the rest of us in her views on teachers always being right. We had to accept her ideas a bit but you could see her changing her ways within months of arriving. If you don't change a little, you ossify. But we did need to keep changing—if that had stopped happening, and nobody had changed we could easily have all stopped growing. It didn't happen, but you could see that it could have done.

We didn't meet as a whole group very often. There wasn't time, though sometimes after school we'd all sit down for half an hour or so, and occasionally we went out for lunch all together and had longer for talking. Somehow the ideas seemed to move between us by osmosis. But we did talk a lot in overlapping twos and threes, yes, a lot, about all sorts of things, as they came up. That was terribly influential. It was the constant talking, and the openness that helped me to change.

It made us feel very together, because we knew each other so well, and gave each other so much support. We didn't see much of each other outside school but if there had been more time we could have been friends and done things together as well . . . It was a tremendous feeling, I missed them terribly when I moved on. I still think about it. We really changed that whole school in the time I was there, and the parents changed too because we spent a lot of time talking to them as well. We couldn't any of us have done it on our own (Nias 1986a).

In the same study other teachers described similar experiences, though in less detail. Two are given here. Both are taken from transcripts of interviews used in Nias (1986a). The first is from a recently-appointed primary headteacher, who had been a class teacher for ten years:

Int: I was interested in what you were saying about that school and working with Sarah and Alan. Was that the first time you had actually worked closely with anyone?

T: Yes. It stopped me from being an extreme and totally neurotic loner. I think that changed an awful lot of my outlook.

Int: How did it happen?

T: I honestly don't know. Partly to do with the building—it was an open-plan unit of four classes and we had three of them. The other person—the fourth person who changed a couple of times never entirely fitted into the group . . . we were always talking, putting the world to rights . . . It did me a lot of good. It persuaded me—it got me listening to other people and it got to a stage when I was secure with them, in particular to take their criticisms. I can remember vividly being told by Sarah in a friendly way, long before we were reasonably good friends, 'Look you're not going to make any progress while you're continually putting backs up left, right and centre, couldn't we try it this way?' and my reply was 'No!' but she repeated the exercise and it did me a lot of good. . . . Alan was like that too. We all fitted in together, though it wasn't always easy. He was pretty neurotic too . . . a strange, somewhat immature but very talented lad, just out of college. We very quickly realised that we had things to learn from him as well. I think that's what made the difference. In certain areas he was clearly the leader and it provided him with a degree of security that we were willing to listen to him too.

Int: Was the development of your 'team' encouraged by the head?
T: No, the head didn't have anything to do with it, in fact we must have been rather a pain from his point of view. It was Sarah really, she started us off . . . We didn't meet formally, there was no need to—it was the usual times, mostly after school, lunch times, in the morning, sometimes—whenever we felt the need to, but working together, there's always something that happened or some child or an idea that one of you wants to talk about (Nias 1986a).

The second example was given by a woman teacher with eight years' classroom experience:

I started off in a large teaching area with the deputy principal and another girl, that was when I was a probationer . . . They gave me a room with a door to start with, but gradually the door opened and I became part of the unit. It was a good way to start teaching. . .

The energy in the school was fantastic . . . [it came from the principal]. He had a definite philosophy about the way he wanted his school to run but he never interfered with the way you taught. If he didn't agree with you, he'd tell you, often in a public and rude manner, but you could take that because . . . he didn't bear any grudges and let you carry on expressing yourself the way you felt was best, and you could talk to him too. I think the energy came from having a body of professional people who were interested and did things together . . . There was a lot of talk.

The problem for me in the end was that there was too much change . . . also it was taking my life over. Everything I was doing was involved with the school, I loved my day there but I used to be incredibly tired. I miss it though . . . we didn't always agree but we spent a lot of time doing things for school together and we learnt from each other . . . Perhaps we'd make it a social occasion too—we were always going out together.

[In this job] we're finding the need more and more for young teachers to get together, to give each other ideas, to spark off from one another. In fact we're trying . . . to set up a group of teachers who have special in-service courses for themselves . . . [and] to develop [part of a school] where we can meet.

In my first school, you could talk about philosophy and argue about it and if your view was different from somebody else's you could have an argument. In this school you can't, you can't really have any views at all because you're not sure whether anyone will agree with you and if they don't agree with you they hold it against you. So if it's part of you, something you've believed all your life and you're holding it in all the time then you have problems, don't you, if you can't express yourself? Then Beth came along and she isn't like that at all, so we huddle in the little corners and talk about things we feel passionately about. I go home to her house in the evening if there's a problem we really want to thrash out. She's brought me out a lot, . . . made me realise the ways I can change and helped me do it . . . I wish there was a group of us, like there was in my first school . . . [If I could change one thing here] it would be to make the staff be far more open and honest about teaching and while they're actually at school, to work as a team. We're just not benefitting from everybody's experience and ideas and they're too isolated, everybody is, and nobody's happy because there isn't unity, we aren't a group . . . I think we'd benefit an awful lot if it opened up and we could talk to each other. I think the rest would follow then (Nias 1986a).

A number of the statements made in these interviews suggest that many of the necessary conditions for a 'free associative' discussion group were

being met for these teachers and their colleagues, despite the absence of formal planning or organisation for the development of such a group. These conditions were:

1 Opportunities existed for the group to come together and to meet, in overlapping twos and threes, if not all together. In the first instance, these opportunities were spatial because proximity led members to talk to one another. Once the habit of meeting had been formed, members fitted it in whenever they could.

2 They were committed to being group members and so were the other members. Though 'the group' in its full membership did not meet very often, individuals knew that it existed and that its existence was important to them. It had an identity which was independent of the numbers present at any particular meeting.

3 The whole group met from time to time.

4 Members took time to talk because talking was seen as a valuable and productive activity. They felt that they were learning and developing through their discussions.

5 They were prepared to disagree, even quite strongly with other group members.

6 They let themselves be influenced by others and, in turn, influenced them: that is, they were prepared to change and be changed.

7 Communication between group members was open. They felt secure enough to talk freely, though this state was reached over time, rather than existing from the start.

8 When discussions took place there was a flexible agenda, set by members' tacit consent.

9 Although it was work which drew members together in the first place and was the main focus of their discussions, no firm boundaries were drawn between personal and professional concerns. What mattered was what individuals wanted to talk about.

10 Relationships between members were egalitarian, taking no account of formal status. Groups had a leader, in the sense that someone took the initiative in starting the discussions, but after that early initiative he or she normally participated simply as a member of the group.

11 Relationships between members became non-competitive. Personal defences were gradually dropped and members were able to try out on each other new ideas and ways of acting.

12 Members offered and received reciprocal support.

In short, these informal groups created a 'matrix' by means of which members could interact and develop. In many essential ways they resembled Foulkes's 'free associative' groups, helping their members to understand themselves and each other and the behaviour of both; to create, through talking, new, shared meanings and common understandings; and to change their perspectives and 'basic assumptions' and sometimes their actions. As in Foulkes's groups, interaction was supportive but it was not always free of conflict, resistance and pain. Although the groups were implicitly educational in intent, they developed, as Foulkes argued would

be the case, a life and identity of their own, creating a background against which the changing 'figure' of the individual could be understood but from which it could not be separated.

They differ from Foulkes's therapeutic groups in three important respects. Far from being strangers, their members knew each other well outside group meetings and shared with one another and with their leaders a common occupational culture. They saw one another frequently and interacted in many different capacities. This is in keeping with Abercrombie's (1984a) claim that educational groups, having different purposes from therapeutic groups, function more effectively in a shared occupational milieu. Their members can interpret the subtleties and nuances of each other's speech more swiftly and efficiently than strangers would and, against a background of shared knowledge, can rapidly call the taken-for-granted into question.

The second difference relates to the size of a 'group' meeting. The whole membership of these informal school groups seldom met together. Instead they talked in overlapping twos and threes, meeting as a whole group often enough to affirm their group identity but not sufficiently often to make it the main forum for their activities. There are two ways, however, in which this is consistent with Foulkes's ideas, both bearing on the relationship between the individual and the group. First, Foulkes' insistence that all members come into a group permeated with their own socio-historical context, allows us to see each small sub-group meeting as part of the total group 'matrix'. Such a sub-group has its own interactions, valid in their own right, but these consciously or unconsciously affect the behaviour of individuals in other sub-groups and in the whole group when it meets. They are part of the process and structure which affect the content of the total group communication, and in that sense they enrich the interactions taking place within the latter rather than competing with it.

Second, the notion of a group which consists of overlapping small groups is entirely consistent with Foulkes's description of the individual as the nodal point in a network of nerve fibres. It is clear from these teachers' accounts that each individual was constantly communicating with two or more others, within the overall boundary of the total membership. All were repeatedly engaging in the process of sending, transmitting, interpreting, receiving messages—the communication network of the whole group gave meaning and efficacy to its individual components.

Since to Foulkes the essence of a group is in the communication which goes on amongst its members rather than in the nature of its boundary, the fact that in the schools where these teachers work the whole group meets less frequently than varying clusters of its members, does not invalidate its claim to be considered a group.

Finally, Foulkes felt it important that groups should meet regularly, with place and time protected from intrusion. These school groups were forced to meet informally, often briefly, frequently in public spaces like corridors and staffrooms, though wherever possible their longer meetings were held in places (e.g. their own classrooms) where they could be free to speak confidentially and without interruption. The fact that groups did flourish, despite the absence of safeguarded times and places is a tribute to the importance their members attached to them, not an argument for casual, intermittent opportunities for communication. Foulkes may have been wrong in suggesting that a 'free' discussion group

must meet in an established place at a regular hour, but he was probably right in thinking that communication would be richer and more open if it did. Teachers repeatedly say that they would like more time to talk with one another during the school day.

'Free' discussion groups can then, exist and act as change agents in guises and under conditions different from those described by either Foulkes or Abercrombie. The teachers whom I have quoted here obviously felt that the groups of which they were (or had been) members were constructive and potent forces in their professional development. It would not require miracles or the moving of institutional mountains to create the conditions under which similar groups might flourish in other schools. Proximity (at least to start with), shared professional interests, a sympathetic supportive leader (within the school), some organisational flexibility to allow sub-groups to meet—the rest lies in the willingness of individuals to share and be open, and this in turn will happen only if they find the experience personally rewarding and extending. Of course, not all teachers will want or be willing to use the chance of belonging to such a group but their evident value to those who have been members suggests that nothing would be lost—and much might be gained—by the attempt.

Perhaps, then, we need to provide in two ways opportunities for teachers to consider, in collaborative settings, the 'anatomy of their judgments'. Some teachers may benefit from the more formally organised group, meeting outside their schools and working days. Simultaneously, however, many informal groups may be nurtured within school by sympathetic administration and sensitive leadership. The two forms of group should not be seen as mutually exclusive.

Two problems remain. The first brings us back to reference groups, and to the argument that though they may, in Lewin's terms, help individuals to 'unfreeze', they may encourage the latter to 'refreeze' round their new perspectives. How can we ensure that a group formed to help its members perceive the need for personal change and carry it out does not in time become a conservative force, encouraging conformity and rigidity, locking its members into a new, unyielding frame of reference? Three answers suggest themselves: to ensure that the norm of the group supports continuing ambiguity, doubt and questioning as natural and desirable states of mind, rather than as once-for-all activities; to encourage frequent changes in membership; and to limit the lifespan of the group (or of individuals in it), in the knowledge that a similar group can be born again should the need arise.

The second problem is both more sensitive and more difficult to solve. If groups formed with the deliberate intention of 'consciousness-raising' meet with resistance from those whose interests they seem to threaten, how will they survive? I find it hard to answer this question except by suggesting that not all those who hold power are opposed to change; that some people within the educational system have attained positions of influence precisely because they wish to encourage reform. It is a mistake to assume that everyone in authority is 'the enemy'. Nevertheless, groups which encourage their members to think for themselves, in particular to understand their socio-historical context and to act to change it, are inevitably subversive. It is this aspect of Foulkes's ideas that I consider next.

Group-analytic psychotherapy and critical theory

While time has been demonstrating the failure of established theories of innovation adequately to account for or bring about change in schools, support has been growing in the social sciences for the notion that social change will not take place unless participants actively engage in reshaping the way they see the world and themselves in relationship to it. This view is particularly popular among those who seek a means of transforming society (and schools) which does not involve force or manipulation: in short, a 'social theory [which] is not the means for greater manipulative power but rather for self-understanding that allows one's own rational thinking to be the cause of one's actions; ie, [it] is a means towards increased *autonomy*' (Fay 1977a, p. 207). Indeed, Carr and Kemmis (1983) have recently made the prescriptive claim that:

> educational theory must always be orientated towards transforming the ways in which teachers see themselves and their situation so that the factors frustrating the rational development of their practices can be recognised and eliminated. Equally, it must be oriented towards transforming the situations which place obstacles in the way of achieving educational goals (p. 128).

Those sociologists and philosophers who are proponents of critical theory strongly believe that, to be effective, social change must be 'owned' by those who experience it and carry it out. Habermas, one of its pioneers, spoke of it as 'enlightenment theory' and argued that it pre-supposed for individuals 'the experience of an emancipation by means of critical insight into relationships of power' (1974 pp. 253–4). By this he meant much the same at a societal level as Foulkes did at a personal level, that is, that the experience of understanding the constraints which shape one's beliefs, attitudes and actions is a liberating one.

That Foulkes and Habermas should share a common perspective, expressed though it is in different ways, is not surprising. Before the former developed his philosophy and practice of group analysis in England between 1940 and 1976, he worked from 1930 to 1933 at the Institute of Psychoanalysis in Frankfurt. This institute was in the same university building as the Institute of Social Research which was, by the time Foulkes arrived in Frankfurt, renowned for its formulation of critical theory. Its exponents included Horkheimer, Adorno and Marcuse whose work inspired many subsequent writers, including Fromm, who attempted to integrate Marxism with psychoanalytic theory, and Habermas. Though Foulkes did not dwell in detail on his intellectual relationship with these social scientists, many of their ideas are so similar to his that some degree

of mutual influence must, arguably, have existed.

Critical theory evolved in response to the rise of Nazism in the 1920s and 1930s. Some German intellectuals, opposed to the activities of the Nazis as they rose to and exercised power, found that the defence of the Party and the State, offered by Leninism-Marxism, was an alternative open to the same criticisms as the oppressive regime against which they were aligned. Accordingly they sought for an intellectual challenge which would offer an anti-totalitarian way of conceptualising change at all levels of society and within all its institutions. At first in Germany and, subsequently in exile, they worked out the radical theories which are now widely-espoused in many parts of Europe, the Americas and Australia. These put new meaning into the notion of 'participatory democracy' by seeking 'to transform the self-consciousness of individuals so as to make it possible for them to collectively determine the sort of life they wish to live and the sort of action they need to take in order to bring about the social conditions under which such a way of life is possible' (Carr & Kemmis 1983, p. 129). Their best known exponent in the English-speaking world is Habermas whose work is difficult to read, even in translation, and who is therefore probably most familiar to the non-specialist through the expositions and commentaries of Bernstein (1979), Fay (1977b) and Carr and Kemmis (1983).

The work of Habermas, which has its roots in the ideas of Kant, Hegel and Marx, posits a dialectical relationship between the beliefs which people hold (e.g. about themselves, their social relationships, the causal processes which affect them) and the conditions under which they live. People's perceptions are shaped by their experience which includes, most influentially, the social and institutional structures and the culture within which they live. At the same time, these perceptions and the ideas which flow from them, continue to uphold the structures, since the way individuals construe their world ensures that they collude in their own destinies. So, for example, in England and Australia, women may fail to apply for leadership positions in schools because they believe their family responsibilities should come first. Since social and institutional structures and the socialisation to which boys and girls are differentially subjected ensure that they go on believing this, men continue to hold the leadership positions and both sexes go on subscribing to the notion that women like to put the family first. In this sense, women, like Paulo Freire's peasants, behave as if they had no option but to see themselves as passive and adaptive (Fay 1977a). They do not understand that they have the potential to intervene in the processes which determine and limit their choices and to transform them. They may be the victims of family, social or political pressures, but they are often unquestioning, and sometimes willing victims whose very acquiesence recreates similar patterns of socialisation and self-definition from one generation to the next. As Carr and Kemmis (1983 p. 180) put it: 'As [we] look beyond the inadequacies and contradictions of . . .[our] own practices, [we] find ideological and institutional patterns which are to some extent responsible for maintaining these inadequacies and contradictions.'

To understand how individuals interpret the relationships and structures of which they are part, we have to try to participate in their worlds and adopt their perspectives. What matters to actors in a situation is not

what anyone else sees, but the meanings that they themselves impute to their interactions and the way they interpret their own behaviour and that of others. To the extent that they are communicating (that is, understanding one another's words and intentions) they share a framework of meaning. No observer can understand others' self-definitions and the social world in which they participate or join in the communication between them, unless he or she can penetrate this framework and the tacit understandings that are enclosed within it.

Once shared meanings have been established and a language found for communication, members of a social system can interrupt the dialectical relationship between self-understandings and structures by presenting one another with alternative interpretations of situations, behaviours, relationships. When they begin to see themselves, their thoughts, actions and circumstances from a different perspective, they have taken the first step towards altering the patterns of interaction which characterise their social relationships and therefore their self-images. In many situations we assume, until someone points out to us the falseness of our perceptions, or offers us an alternative, that the ways in which we and others act are governed by law-like rules of behaviour. By contrast, critical social science seeks to treat all situations and actions as problematic rather than given. Even the common-sense reality of our daily lives must be called in question, we must search for meanings and patterns in interactions and activities that are normally taken for granted. Only in this way will we come to recognise that we can choose how we perceive ourselves and our relationships with others. It is one of the main aims of critical theorists that individuals should come to see themselves as self-determining subjects not as people who are the objects of others' beliefs, wills and policies.

Once people have begun to 'problem-pose' (Freire 1972) they will become aware of the structures (e.g. class, educational, legal, religious, institutional) which determine and distort their self-understandings. When they realise that there is a causal link between the circumstances of their lives and what they accept as the truth, they have taken a further step towards their own emancipation; they are now in a position to call in question not just their own beliefs and assumptions but also the relationships and institutions which cause them to hold these.

The structures which shape people's perspectives are themselves the result of 'ideology', which Carr and Kemmis (1983 p. 180) define as 'the means by which a society reproduces the social relations which characterise it . . . it is the cultural and cognitive "residue" of the practices which sustain a society socially, economically and politically'. Now Habermas believed that all groups, however deeply characterised by dependence, possess the potential (under ideal conditions which he defined in Habermas 1979) to assess their situation critically, to reach a rationally justified consensus about it and to determine on the basis of this consensus the course of action most likely to lead to the fulfilment of 'universal human interests' (that is, social justice, equality, freedom and happiness). These were, in a clearly normative sense, Habermas's view of what constituted people's 'real' interests; that is, anyone would seek them under 'emancipated' conditions of rational autonomy. Therefore any social, cultural, economic or political system which denies its members emancipation (i.e. the oppor-

tunity to exercise their capacity for rational autonomy), by shaping the way they see themselves in relationship to others and thus by misinforming them as to their 'real' needs and desires, is guilty of preventing them from seeking their 'universal' interests. In other words, it is exercising 'ideological domination' over them. Since every perception or assumption is part of a coordinated set of values which individuals hold as a result of 'ideological domination', expressed in and mediated by the rules and structures of their social group, they do not achieve emancipation by changing one of them. To become 'critical' involves challenging all the values of your social group as being mistaken or false (in that they are antipathetical to Habermas's 'universal human interests'). People will, however, find this difficult because they are the victims of 'false consciousness'; their self-perceptions are deeply embedded in the very values which they must learn to contest. Moreover, these values are exemplified and reaffirmed by every aspect of their daily lives. So, those who reject the dominant values of their society will not only find themselves opposed to its structures but will also be faced by the need to redefine their personal identities. Furthermore, since social values are, by definition, held by large groups of people, it will not be easy for individuals to offer a single-handed challenge to the instruments of ideological domination.

There is likely to be a further threat to the individual's sense of identity and of belonging. Habermas (1979) argued that the ability of a group's members to talk together with understanding relies upon their acceptance of shared values, expressed as norms which are consensually agreed and perceived as mutually binding. When values change, so do the norms which stem from them. Consensus then breaks down and so in turn does communication. To be unable to communicate with your social group is to be truly isolated and in many cases to become fearful, self-doubting and depressed.

It will be easier for people to see their lives and beliefs as 'problematic' if they realise that structures and the values which these represent are the product of history as well as of present circumstances. Their understandings will be more complete and less free from self-delusion when they become aware of their roots, of the processes which brought about their present realities and of the long chain of ideological distortions which have resulted in their present submission to forms of control which run counter to their 'universal human interests'. 'Critical theory, then, is not "critical" simply in the sense of voicing disapproval of contemporary social arrangements, but in the sense that it attempts to distill the historical processes which have caused subjective meanings to become systematically distorted' (Carr & Kemmis 1983, p. 135).

Once people know what causes their ideas, beliefs and behaviour they will perceive such causes as external rather than internal to them. Then they will begin to see the possibilities that exist for self-transformation, by altering the structures and institutions which control and condition them. Awareness of the present and the past and of the causative links between the two, will lead eventually to 'emancipatory' action. The ultimate purpose of 'critique', the 'relentless criticism of existing social conditions which maintain irrationality, injustice and social fragmentation, and domination and coercion', (Carr & Kemmis 1983, p. 180) is social change, brought about by the participants in it and directed towards the

goals of justice, equality, freedom and happiness. 'It is not simply changing the *ideas* of a group of people that will free them from oppressive social institutions—they must change *these conditions and forms of behaviour themselves* on the basis of their new understandings of themselves' (Fay 1977a, p. 213). They must, to quote Habermas (1974 p. 310) transform 'ideologically frozen relations of dependence' by their own actions.

To this end they must be actively involved since, in 'the process of enlightenment, there can only be participants' (Habermas 1974). Understanding of what actions participants should take can come only from what Habermas calls 'practical discourse', that is rational discussion of alternatives under ideal conditions. These conditions, which Van Manen (1977 p. 222) describes as the absence of 'repressive dominance, [and of] assymmetry, or inequality . . . among the participants' are; the desire to achieve consensus; the rejection by participants of all motives other than helping one another to understand what exists, and of determining the best resulting course of action; and equal power relations among them. In the absence of these conditions the more powerful or more skilled can manipulate the rest into perceptions of their condition which may be new to them without being emancipatory, and which they have no opportunity to evaluate or reject.

By contrast, when Habermas's 'ideal conditions' exist, participants can communicate freely and openly with one another; that is, they can engage in 'discourse'. Discourse is directed towards the discovery of the truth in situations where consensus about the norms against which it could previously have been evaluated, has broken down. Habermas (quoted in Carr & Kemmis 1983, p. 139) claims that:

> Discourses help test the truth claims of opinions (and norms) which the speakers no longer take for granted. In discourse, the 'force' of the argument is the only permissible compulsion, whereas co-operative search for truth is the only permissible motive . . . Discourse produces nothing but argument.

As Habermas suggests, this argument will be concerned with assessing the merits of conflicting 'truth claims'. All such claims will be subjected through discussion to four tests of validity (Habermas 1979, calls them 'validity claims'):

- Is what is stated comprehensible? (Can all listeners understand what is being said?)
- Is it true? (Is it believable? Does the evidence support it or would other accounts fit the evidence better?)
- Is the speaker sincere? (Are statements made in good faith with a genuine expression of the speaker's intentions and without the listeners being manipulated or misled?)
- Is it right for the speaker to be speaking? (Can listeners accept his legitimacy in that they can see no unfair advantage is being taken of position or status?)

Because the conditions under which the discourse takes place allow for the rational assessment of these validity claims (and thus of the truth claims in the examination of which they are being used) any consensus arrived at can be regarded as a true consensus.

Habermas accepted that few social situations are likely to be charac-

terised by ideal conditions, and especially by completely symmetrical power relations. However, people must behave as if ideal conditions exist; they must 'anticipate the social structure of a living together in unforced communication' (Van Manen 1977, p. 223). That is, they must proceed with the discussion as if its outcome will be due only to the force of the better argument. Everyone who uses language is innately capable of distinguishing a true consensus from a false one. Thus even in less than ideal conditions, people who are talking to one another in everyday language are capable of detecting false validity claims such as distorted communication and the asymmetrical social structures which cause it. 'The pursuit of an ideal form of life in which free and open communication is possible . . . is . . . the explicit recognition of an ideal which is, as yet, unrealised, but which is promised by, and anticipated in, the very activity of language' (Carr & Kemmis 1983, p. 140). Habermas described as 'communicative competence' the notion that the act of speech holds within itself the possibility of ideal conditions in which truth can be discovered through the exercise of rationality, freedom and equality, in such a way that when rationality, freedom and equality are the aims of discussion as well as the means, truth will result. Thus free and open communication and the mutual understanding of subjective intentions can, potentially, grow from any commitment to discussion.

Talking is, then, the necessary condition for 'emancipation': everyday speech can lead to the ideal conditions in which 'practical discourse' takes place. Through the latter, participants will reach a true understanding of the social and historical constraints under which they live and of the actions which they should take to free themselves.

It may be significant that the fullest account of education carried out with a deliberate emancipatory intention is that of Freire (1972) who worked with peasants outside the school system. It is in this context that the work of Foulkes takes on an additional significance, for his ideas and Abercrombie's development of them, seem to offer one way of translating critical theory into action in the educational system. The emphasis of both upon the individual as a participating member of a group, and upon the group as the means of enabling the individual to question and change his or her perspectives and relationships, forms a bridge between descriptive accounts of action-research and school-based innovation, and the theory-building of philosophers and social scientists.

There are indeed striking similarities between Foulkes's formulation of group-analytic psychotherapy and Habermas's theory of social change. In summary:

1 Both, following Marx, stress the social nature of man and the value to the individual of association with others. 'Only in community with others has each individual the means of cultivating his gifts in all directions. In the real community the individuals obtain a freedom in and through their association' (Marx, quoted in Pines 1983, p. 266).

2 Both see the individual as permeated by the culture, history, institutions and structures of his or her society and by the values which these convey.

3 Both argue that a necessary condition for personal change is that individuals should understand how they have been shaped and are

currently influenced by their socio-historical contexts and by the values with which these are imbued.

4 Both stress that an important part of this understanding is the realisation that all aspects of the individual's belief-system and personal and social circumstances can be questioned, and that alternative perspectives exist.

5 Both believe that this process of questioning, interpreting, responding and adapting should be continuous and unending.

6 Both feel that it should take place between peers, to reduce the likelihood that undue influence might force new but distorted perceptions upon individuals.

7 Both stress the individual's responsibility for his or her own liberation from the domination of the present, shaped as it is by the past. It is only through active search and participation that people can arrive at new self-understandings and perceive alternative ways of believing and behaving. It is only through their own conscious actions that they can alter the circumstances of their lives.

8 Both consider change to be the result of a dialectical process of reflection, insight and action.

9 Both place communication at the heart of their theoretical formulations. Both see full, free communication as the means by which alternatives can be canvassed and considered (though Foulkes does not appear to believe, as Habermas does, that under the right conditions the truth will emerge from debate about alternatives). Both believe that everyone has the potential for the discussion of alternatives (though Foulkes stresses the importance of the irrational, unconscious elements of such exchanges while Habermas emphasises the individual's capacity for rationality). Both see communication and understanding as complementary and reciprocally reinforcing, and both feel that understanding is rooted in shared meanings (though Habermas claims that these common meanings derive from mutually agreed values, while Foulkes argues they can be worked out by interaction within the group).

10 Both are clear that it is not easy to achieve understanding. To Foulkes, it results only when each individual is prepared to strive continuously towards making himself or herself understood by others; to Habermas it comes through argument and debate.

11 Both posit similar necessary conditions for full and free communication. The social structure, atmosphere and norms of the group must allow and encourage all individuals to contribute and to feel that they are of equal worth. All members must be committed to the process of debate and must accept a shared responsibility for understanding and being understood.

12 Both see language as vitally important in bringing about social change, because it is speech alone that sets in train and sustains the process of communication (Foulkes) or discourse (Habermas) which in turn enables individuals to arrive at new self-understandings and to recognise what actions they can take to change their circumstances.

13 Both claim that all human beings have an innate capacity to use and understand speech.

14 Implicit in the theories of both is an almost teleogical view of human nature which appears to be at odds with their belief in individual responsibility. Habermas claims that there is an ideal form of life in which rationally autonomous individuals can actively seek their 'universal human interests', and that man's striving towards this ideal is implicit in his capacity to talk. Foulkes appears to think that if guaranteed free and open communication, group members create the optimal conditions for the personal growth of all their members. In other words, both take a tacitly normative view of human endeavour (i.e. each has a view which informs the rest of his argument as to what constitutes a 'good' human decision or choice).

It is obvious that group-analytic psychotherapy and critical social science not only share a common genesis in the neo-Marxism of pre-war Germany but also address the same areas of human concern, are based upon the same underlying values, and take very similar views on how to help people move towards them. The precise processes by which these similarities evolved are not known, though Habermas was strongly influenced by the methodological procedures of psychoanalysis and in particular by 'the psychoanalytic method of self-reflection as a way of bringing to consciousness those distortions in patients' self-formative processes which prevent a correct understanding of themselves and their actions' (Carr & Kemmis 1983, p. 136).

Unless Foulkes had formulated his notions of group-analysis before he came to England—and the evidence suggests that he had not—Habermas's experience of psychoanalysis would have been confined to the treatment of individuals on their own or, at most, within a group. The idea that there could be, as Foulkes advocated, analysis of the group, by the group, in the group, would not have been current before Habermas left Frankfurt. Certainly, neither of them appears to have realised the similarities between their theories, geared as each was to a different aspect of social sciences.

Be that as it may, Foulkes's group-analytic methods, the formal use that has been made of them in adult education and their informal adaptation to self-help staff development provide examples of the sort of collaborative strategies which are missing from most of the existing literature, yet which are necessary if critical theory is to be translated into action in schools.

To view the work of Foulkes and Abercrombie from this perspective is to throw new light on the 'emancipatory' nature of their theories. To be sure, they sought the personal rather than the political liberation of their subjects, but it is the essence of Foulkes's thought that individuals are inseparable from their contexts. Their emancipation consists in uncovering, understanding, reviewing and, if they so decide, changing their basic assumptions and the actions which stem from these. Yet beliefs and behaviour are social in origin and both are sustained by contact with other people, through participation in membership and reference groups. They cannot be changed without rejecting, or challenging those who are responsible for forming and reinforcing them. Individuals cannot change themselves without affecting others, since we are all bound up in a complex

network of interdependencies. At its simplest, teachers cannot change their views on the nature of learning and alter their behaviour accordingly without having an effect upon their pupils. If the latter accommodate to this change, they will carry their new perspectives into other teachers' classes causing further disequilibrium in established methods and relationships. This is likely, in turn, to affect these teachers' behaviour to different pupils—and so on. It is also likely that teachers will start to discuss these changes amongst themselves, offering one another new perspectives directly as well as through the medium of their pupils. So a teacher who 'liberates' himself or herself, for example, from the assumptions that pupils need to have the same knowledge as he or she does and that this can be achieved by the teacher taking an active role and the pupils a passive one, is challenging the status quo throughout the school, and even beyond it. As Bernstein (1971) argues in his seminal paper 'Open Schools, Open Society?', changes in teachers' basic assumptions reflect and engender challenges to the established order outside school. Foulkes himself was concerned with the adjustment of individuals to the society in which they lived and not politics, yet his views on the nature of the group and the effect upon individuals of 'corrective interaction' within it can be construed as radical. In stressing the social nature of man, in arguing that individuals achieve their potential only within and through the group and that their potency comes from communication with others, Foulkes aligned himself with a collectivist rather than an individualistic view of society and of human behaviour.

Similarly, when he substituted for a traditional leader a conductor who was 'the first servant of the group', Foulkes (1964, p. 88) tacitly challenged the conventional hierarchies of the medical and military worlds within which he operated. The implications of Abercrombie's views on authority in education were similar. Neither rejected order or advocated anarchy but both wished to move responsibility for direction and control from the centre of the group into the hands of group members. They trusted individual participants and the group as a whole to do what would most contribute to the growth of both.

Abercrombie developed the educational significance of these ideas. Deploring the authority-dependence of many adults and the damaging effect this had upon their capacity to learn anything other than that which they were told, she encouraged her students to think for themselves, to challenge their own perceptions as well one another's and, above all, to realise that they could teach themselves and other people by reflecting collaboratively upon their own experience. Educational institutions exist, on the whole, to hand on to new generations the received knowledge and accumulated wisdom of the dominant groups within society. To create a climate in which students' own experience and their attitudes to it are perceived as valid knowledge is as Freire (1972) shows, to offer them potential liberation from more than just the classroom.

Foulkes's group-analytic methods and his rationale for them can, then, be perceived as similar not just in substance but also in intent to Habermas's social theories. Critical theorists may turn to Foulkes because he provides a successful model of collaborative discussion whose aims are self-reflection, shared understandings and the modification of practice. They may also, however, adopt his practices and those of Abercrombie,

because both offer the individual in the group the same radical possibilities for change that Habermas held out at an institutional and societal level. Teachers will find that the work of Foulkes and Abercrombie illuminates the practice of teaching, but that it also offers a challenge to the existing structure of education.

Conclusion

My subject in this paper has been the well-worn one of change in education. I have, however, brought to it notions from the psychology of perception, from social psychology and from psychotherapy in an attempt to throw some fresh light on a topic which has remained obstinately obscure despite the attention which has been directed to it in the past twenty years.

My argument rests upon the claim that teaching consists of making judgments in response to past and in-coming information. However, we selectively receive and interpret the messages reaching us from our sense organs and stored in our brains, in accordance with patterns of perception established in our early years. Indeed, since many of these 'schemata' or, more broadly, 'basic assumptions' (to use Abercrombie's terminology) are formed at a pre-verbal time in our lives, they have not merely sunk from consciousness, but are also difficult to articulate. Until we encounter other people's judgments, attitudes and assumptions we may be totally unaware of our own. Moreover, it is in talking, and especially in discussion with others who hold different perspectives, that we learn the hidden ways in which we perceive the world. To quote the familiar remark attributed to an anonymous child rebuked for talking in class: 'How can I know what I think till I hear what I say?'

We hold basic assumptions not only about our worlds and the people in them but also about ourselves. Like all our schemata the latter are anchored in the frames of reference which we share with others (our 'reference groups') and a change in our perspectives, especially about ourselves and the values we hold at the core of our 'substantial selves', necessitates a change also in the people to whom we turn for affirmation of our judgments. This is particularly the case for teachers, many of whom regard teaching as an activity which is impregnated with values.

Such changes are painful, disturbing and often take a long time to accomplish. As we cross the chasm of personal change we need to be roped to others. The pace of the group may be slowed down by the giving and taking of support, but its progress is likely to be more certain than that of solitary individuals who stand as great a chance of falling to injury or death as they do of obtaining the peak.

There are two reasons then for suggesting that the way teachers behave can be changed only through interaction, and particularly discussion with others. One is perceptual: we need other people's perspectives to make us aware of the ego-centricity of our own and to present us with alterna-

tives. The other is psychological: change, especially in our perceptions of our 'selves' is a form of loss and we can more effectively take on a new identity if we are supported by others through what is essentially a period of bereavement.

Abercrombie, whose work on 'the anatomy of judgment' is a keystone in this argument, reached many of her conclusions by working as a teacher, with groups of students. She modelled her behaviour in conducting these groups upon that of a group psychotherapist. Foulkes differed from other practitioners, not just in regarding individual patients as inseparable from their social and historical contexts, but also in claiming that they should therefore be treated in groups. These groups provided individuals with a new socio-historical context (the 'matrix' of the group) which they constructed for themselves by struggling to understand one another and, especially, by trying to force other group members to behave as they expected them to do. It was through this 'corrective interaction' with others that group members learnt to question their own assumptions, to understand the socio-historical factors which had caused them to hold these views and to adopt specific behaviours and, eventually, to change the latter if they so desired. Analysis was of the group, by the group, in the group and not, as had traditionally been the case, of individuals alone or in a group, by a single analyst. Multiple perspectives were valued for their own sake. More radically, the views of group members had as much status as those of the conductor. Foulkes's groups, like Abercrombie's, were small enough to allow communication between all members, but big and heterogeneous enough to encourage the expression of many views. They were also conducted in an egalitarian atmosphere which was encouraged and sustained by the group's conductor as well as its members.

'Corrective interaction' was the product of all the communication, conscious and unconscious, in the group and this was in turn influenced by everything that was happening and had happened to its members, both inside the group and outside it. Foulkes therefore encouraged 'free associative' talking and not, as is customary in education, focused discussion of a pre-determined topic. Abercrombie modified Foulkes's practice by using members' professional experience or a shared focus as a starting point, but she too believed that individuals could learn from themselves and each other more effectively in a 'free' discussion than they could from a teacher on whose authority they were so dependent that they were open only to his or her suggestions. Even more radically, she believed that members could construct knowledge for themselves and that this knowledge had as much importance and validity as the 'received wisdom' of accepted authorities.

This kind of learning depends upon the active participation of members—a communication network is dead unless messages are passing along it—and upon their willingness to take responsibility for their own learning. In this sense too, group-analytic methods offer a challenge not just to conventional classroom assumptions and procedures but also to traditional notions of the teacher's authority and responsibility. The effectiveness of teaching, it could be argued, depends upon the learner. The role of the teacher is to facilitate communication between members (which may, it should be noted, mean using his or her authority to direct or control the group, but always in the interests of its members not of himself or

herself), and to encourage them to grapple with the construction of new meanings, for themselves and one another. Traditional hierarchies have no place in this process and will almost certainly impede it.

No wonder then that innovation proceeds so slowly and fitfully in schools. As long as teachers' perceptions remain unaltered and they cannot 'own' the changes which are forced upon them, they will ignore or unconsciously subvert them. The milieu in which they can alter their judgments, abandon well-used defences and try out new ways of behaving is the group—small, heterogeneous, egalitarian, its members talking freely about topics of common concern yet struggling against the personal histories and constraints of individuals to create a shared language and mutual understanding, ready to challenge one another but quick to give and accept support, committed to personal growth but seeing this as inseparable from the development of the group as a whole. Yet the characteristics that teaching encourages in teachers, as workers, and that schools have as institutions, provide a context as alien as one could imagine for the development and use of such groups.

Notwithstanding, 'free' discussion groups have been successfully used with teachers as part of a general program of in-service provision. They also appear to have developed spontaneously, but randomly, within schools themselves. Such groups are seldom recognised, other than by their members, as powerful change agents because they are not easily distinguished from the friendship groups which exist in most schools. Members, however, testify to their potency and their ability to offer liberation from existing definitions of self and of educational reality.

They differ in three respects from 'free' discussion groups used in formal educational settings. Boundaries of time and space are not safeguarded as Foulkes and Abercrombie recommended they should be and as I have found to be helpful on in-service courses. Instead, members talk wherever or whenever they can. Attendance at 'meetings' is therefore not regular and punctual as it should be in group-analysis. Rather, members talk in a flexible network of overlapping twos and threes, meeting as a whole group relatively infrequently. Finally, confidentiality is not formally assured; something which is crucial when groups are largely composed of strangers. Instead, members tacitly rely upon the trust which they have built up through their shared concern to create common understandings and to support one another through personal change.

Moreover, 'free' discussion groups used for educational purposes (whether formally or informally) differ from therapeutic groups in tacitly placing more stress upon learning which is occupationally relevant, than upon the resolution of interpersonal differences. The fierce conflict and violent resistance, which often erupt in groups whose overt function is to deal constructively with emotional imbalance and disturbance, are not normally characteristic of teacher groups. The members of the latter are generally more concerned with reflecting upon their occupational lives and judgments than upon their personal experiences. It is important to realise that the use of group-analytic methods in teaching does not imply that education and group-psychotherapy are synonymous. They share common purposes in that both use discussion to reveal to members their unconscious assumptions and the context within which these are embedded and to encourage them to take responsibility for changes in their own

behaviour. Moreover, both are concerned with the formation of new understandings and the development of fresh behaviours. Both accept that the lines between the personal and the occupational, between fantasy and reality, are blurred and that there are times when it is fruitful for the individual and the group to move across them, in either direction. But there the similarities end; although it is not always easy to distinguish learning from healing or vice versa, the two have different ends and distinctive clientele. The cause of educational change is not advanced by confusing it with psychotherapy.

Nor is it likely to be achieved by subsuming it into political philosophy. True, Foulkes's ideas are very similar to those of Habermas, the critical social scientist, for both share a common intellectual debt to the neo-Marxists of the Frankfurt School. Yet the radicalism of Foulkes and Abercrombie does not derive from critical theory; it stands alongside and complements it. Like Habermas, their aim was that the individual should question the 'taken for granted', understand how it has come about, and learn how to change it in the direction of personal emancipation. With him, they saw the latter as inseparable from the liberation and growth of the group; had faith in the capacity of the individual and the group to take responsibility for their own learning and to provide their own constructive leadership. Unlike Habermas, however, they have demonstrated, through case-studies and descriptions, how groups can help the individual to change, in educational as well as psychotherapeutic settings. It is precisely this detailed guidance, especially as to the nature of 'collaboration', which is lacking from critical theory as it is currently applied to education. A main thrust of my argument has been that change in education will come about only when teachers are given the opportunity to assume radically different perspectives from the ones they hold at present. I have also tried to show that 'free' discussion groups may provide both that opportunity and the means by which teachers can learn to use it. The key to the development of such groups is not in imposing membership of them upon all teachers, many of whom may be reluctant or suspicious, but in observing the use some already make of collaborative discussion, fostering their activities and encouraging other teachers to become similarly engaged.

References

Abercrombie, M.L.J. (1969), *The Anatomy of Judgement: An Investigation into the Processes of Perception and Reasoning*, Penguin, Harmondsworth.

Abercrombie, M.L.J. (1974), 'Improving the education of architects' in K. Collier (ed.), *Innovation in Higher Education*, National Foundation for Educational Research, London.

Abercrombie, M.L.J. (1981), 'Changing basic assumptions about teaching and learning' in D. Boud (ed.), *Developing Student Autonomy in Learning*, Kogan Page, London.

Abercrombie, M.L.J. (1983), 'The application of some principals of group analytic psychotherapy to higher education', in M. Pines (ed.), *The Evolution of Group Analysis*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London.

Abercrombie, M.L.J. (1984a), 'Changing higher education by the application of some group-analytic ideas', mimeo, Paper presented to the eighth International Conference of Group Psychotherapy, Mexico City.

Abercrombie, M.L.J., (1984b), 'Some notes on the role of the discussion group leader', mimeo, Cambridge Institute of Education, Cambridge.

Abercrombie, M.L.J., & Terry, P.M. (1978), *Talking to Learn*, Society for Research into Higher Education, Guildford.

Abercrombie, M.L.J., & Terry, P.M. (1979), *Aims and Techniques of Group Teaching*, 4th edn, Society for Research into Higher Education, Guildford.

Ashton, P. (1975), *Aims of Primary Education: A Study of Teachers' Opinions*, Macmillan, London.

Ball, D. (1972), 'Self and identity in the context of deviance: Te case of criminal abortion' in R. Scott & J. Douglas (eds), *Theoretical Perspectives on Deviance*, Basic Books, New York.

Bernstein, B. (1971), 'Open schools, open society?', in Open University, *School and Society: A Sociological Reader*, Routledge & Kegan Paul in association with The Open University Press, London.

Bernstein, R. (1979), *The Restructuring of Social and Political Theory*, Blackwell, London.

Carr, W., & Kemmis, S. (1983), *Becoming Critical: Knowing Through Action Research* (ECT 432/732 Action Research in Curriculum), Deakin University, Vic.

Connell, R. (1985), *Teachers' Work*, Allen & Unwin, London.

Delamont, S. (1976), *Interaction in the Classroom*, Methuen, London.

Doyle, W. (1977), 'Learning the classroom environment: An ecological

analysis', *Journal of Teacher Education* 28(6), 51-5.
Doyle, W. (1977), 'Learning the classroom environment: an ecological analysis', *Journal of Teacher Education* 28(6), 51-5.
Ebbutt, D., & Elliott, J. (eds) (1985), *Issues in Teaching for Understanding*, Longman, London.
Elbaz, F. (1983), *Teacher Thinking: A Study of Practical Knowledge*, Croom Helm, London.
Elliott, J. (1977), 'Developing hypotheses about classrooms from teachers' practical constructs: An account of the work of the Ford Teaching Project', *Interchange* 7(2), 2-22.
Elliott, J., Bridges, D., Ebbutt, D., Gibson, R., & Nias, J. (1981), *School Accountability*, Grant McIntyre, London.
Fay, B. (1977a), 'How people change themselves: The relationship between critical theory and its audience', in T. Ball (ed), *Political Theory and Praxis: New Perspectives*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, Minn.
Fay, B. (1977b), *Social Theory and Political Practice*, Allen & Unwin, London.
Festinger, L. (1957), *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, Calif.
Foulkes, S.H. (1948), *Introduction to Group Analytic Psychotherapy: Studies in the Social Integration of Individuals and Groups*, Heinemann, London.
Foulkes, S.H. (1964), *Therapeutic Group Analysis*, Allen & Unwin, London.
Foulkes, S.H., (1968), 'Dynamic processes in the group-analytic situation', *Group Psychoanalysis and Group Process* 1, 47-73.
Foulkes, S.H. (1973), 'The group as matrix of the individual's mental life', in L. Wolberg & E. Schwartz (eds), *Group Theory*, Intercontinental Medical Book Corporation, New York.
Foulkes, S.H. (1975), 'A short outline of the therapeutic processes in group-analytic psychotherapy', *Group Analysis* 8, 59-63.
Foulkes, S.H., & Anthony, E.J. (1965), *Group Psychotherapy: The Psychoanalytic Approach*, 2nd edn, Penguin, Harmondsworth.
Freire, P. (1972), *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Penguin, Harmondsworth.
Fullan, M. (1982), *The Meaning of Educational Change*, Teachers' College Press, New York.
Habermas, J. (1974), *Theory and Practice*, tr. J. Viertel, Heinemann, London.
Habermas, J. (1979), *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, tr. T. McCarthy, Heinemann, London.
Hammersley, M. (1974), 'The organization of pupil participation', *Sociological Review* 22(3), 353-68.
Hammersley, M. (1976), 'The mobilisation of pupil attention', in M. Hammersley & P. Woods, *The Process of Schooling*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London.
Hammersley, M. (1977), *Teacher Perspectives*, in Open University *Schooling and Society* course, Units 9 & 10, Open University, Milton Keynes.
Hargreaves, D. (1980), 'The occupational culture of teachers' in P. Woods (ed.), *Teacher Strategies: Explorations in the Sociology of the School*, Croom Helm, London.

Ingvarson, L., & Greenway, P. (1984), 'Portrayals of teacher development', *Australian Journal of Education* 28(1), 45–65.
Katz, D. (1960), 'The functional approach to the study of attitude change', *Public Opinion Quarterly* 24, 163–204.
Kelly, G. (1955), *The Psychology of Personal Constructs*, Norton, London.
King, R. (1978), *All Things Bright and Beautiful: A Sociological Study of Infant Schools*, Wiley, Chichester, Sussex.
Kounin, J. (1970), *Discipline and Group Management in Classrooms*, Holt, Rinehart & Winston, London.
Lintott, B. (1983), 'Mind and matrix in the writings of S. H. Foulkes', *Group Analysis* 16(5), 242–8.
Lintott, B. (1986), 'Group work in a course for teachers', mimeo, Cambridge Institute of Education, Cambridge.
Lortie, D. (1975), *School Teacher*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago.
de Maré, P. (1983), 'Michael Foulkes and the Northfield experiment', in M. Pines (ed.) *The Evolution of Group Analysis*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London.
Marris, P. (1974), *Loss and Change*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London.
Mead, G.H. (1934), *Mind, Self and Society*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago.
Merton, R., & Kitt, A. (1957), 'Contributions to the theory of reference group behaviour', in R. Merton (ed.), *Social Theory and Social Structure*, Free Press, Glencoe.
Mezirow, J. (1981), 'A critical theory of adult learning and education', *Adult Education* 32(1), 3–24.
Nash, R. (1973), *Classrooms Observed*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London.
Newcomb, T. (1950), *Social Psychology*, Dryden, New York.
Nias, J. (1972), 'Value-persistence and utility in colleges of education', *Education for Teaching* 89(3), 29–34.
Nias, J. (1981), 'Commitment and motivation in primary school teachers', *Educational Review* 33(3), 181–90.
Nias, J. (1984a), 'Definition and maintenance of self in primary education', *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 5(3), 267–80.
Nias, J. (1984b), 'Learning and acting the role: In-service support for primary teachers', *Educational Review* 36, 3–15.
Nias, J. (1985a), 'A more distant drummer: Teacher development as the development of self', in L. Barton & S. Walker (eds), *Social Change and Education*, Croom Helm, London.
Nias, J. (1985b), 'Talking, listening and identity: Reference groups in primary education', in S. Ball & I. Goodson, *Teachers' Lives and Careers*, Falmer Press, Barcombe.
Nias, J. (1986a), 'Schools as well as children: Why mid-career teachers need their colleagues', mimeo, Cambridge Institute of Education, Cambridge.
Nias, J. (1986b), What is it to feel like a teacher? The subjective reality of primary teaching, Paper presented to the British Educational Research Conference, Bristol.
Pines, M. (1983), 'The contribution of S. H. Foulkes to group therapy', in M. Pines (ed), *The Evolution of Group Analysis*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London.
Pollard, A. (1985), *The Social World of the Primary School*, Holt Rinehart & Winston, London.

Riseborough, G. (1985), 'Pupils, teachers' careers and schooling: An empirical study' in S. Ball & I. Goodson, *Teachers' Lives and Careers*, Falmer Press, Barcombe.

Rokeach, M. (1983), *The Nature of Human Values*, Free Press, New York.

Rudduck, J., & Hopkins, D. (1985), *Research as a Basis for Teaching: Readings from the work of Lawrence Stenhouse*, Heinemann, London.

Scheinfeld, D., & Messerschmidt, D. (1979), 'Teachers' classroom ideals, structural decisions and views of the person-world relationship', *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 11(4), 299–314.

Schön, D. (1971), *Beyond the Stable State*, Norton, New York.

Schön, D. (1983), *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action*, Temple Smith, London.

Sharp, R., & Green, A. (1975), *Education and Social Control*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London.

Sherif, M., & Wilson, M. (1953), *Group Relations at the Crossroads*, Harper & Row, New York.

Shibutani, T. (1972), 'Reference groups as perspectives', in J. Manis & B. Meltzer (eds), *Symbolic Interaction: A Reader in Social Psychology*, 2nd edn, Allyn & Bacon, Boston.

Stenhouse, L. (1975), *Introduction to Curriculum Development*, Heinemann, London.

Taylor, M.T. (1976), 'Teachers' perceptions of their pupils', *Research in Education* 16, 26–35.

Van Manen, M. (1977), 'Linking ways of knowing with ways of being practical', *Curriculum Inquiry* 6(3), 205–28.

Vernon, M. (1955), 'The functions of schemata in perceiving', *Psychological Review* 62(3), 180–93.

Woods, P. (1979), *The Divided School*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London.

Woods, P. (1981), 'Strategies, commitment and identity: Making and breaking the teacher role', in L. Barton, & S. Walker (eds), *School, Teachers and Teaching*, Falmer Press, Barcombe.

Yalom, I. (1970), *Theory and Practice of Group Psychotherapy*, Basic Books, New York.

Yonemura, M. (1982), 'Teacher conversations: A potential source of their own growth', *Curriculum Inquiry* 12(3), 239–56.

Acknowledgments

Permission to reproduce the quotations on the following pages is acknowledged.
pp. 3,4,6,7,11,22–3,26: From M. L. J. Abercrombie (1969), *The Anatomy of Judgement: An Investigation into the Processes of Perception and Reasoning*, Penguin. Reproduced by permission of Century Hutchinson; pp. 16,17,18,21: Reproduced by permission of Sage Publications.

Deakin University
Teachers' theories of action
Seeing anew: teachers' theories of action
ISBN 0 7300 0448 1
Cat. no. 000000228